DECEMBER 31st ISSUE, 1926
VOL. LXI No. 1

ADVENTURE

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Adventure

December 31st

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By W. C. Tuttle

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1926

VOL. LXI. NO. 1

Adventure

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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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Here's

a new complete Novel

Two Fares East

By W. C. Tuttle

CHAPTER I

WEDDING NIGHT

THE ranch-house of Uncle Hozie Wheeler's Flying H outfit was ablaze with light. Two lanterns were suspended on the wide veranda which almost encircled the rambling old house; lanterns were hanging from the corral fence, where already many saddle-horses and buggy teams were tied. Lanterns hung within the big stable, and there was a lantern suspended to the crosstree of the big estate.

It was a big night at the Flying H. One of the stalls in the stable was piled full of a miscellaneous collection of empty five-gallon cans, cow-bells, shotguns; in fact, every kind of a noise-maker common to the cattle country was ready for the final words of the minister. For this was to be the biggest shivaree ever pulled off on the Tumbling River range.

Inside the living-room was the assembled company, sitting stiffly around the room, more than conscious of the fact that they were all dressed up. Old gray-bearded cattlemen, munching away at their tobacco; old ladies, dressed in all the finery at their limited command; cowboys, uncomfortable in celluloid collars and store clothes; old Uncle Hozie, red of face, grinning at everybody and swearing under his breath at Aunt Emma, who had shamed him into wearing an old Prince Albert coat which had fitted him fifty pounds ago.

"Look like you was the groom, Hozie," chuckled one of the old cattlemen. "Gosh, yo're shore duded-up!"

"Glad I ain't," said Uncle Hozie quickly. "All them wimmin up-stairs, blubberin' over the bride. Haw, haw, haw, haw! She'd ort to have on a swimmin' suit. Haw, haw, haw, haw!"

He winked one eye expressively and jerked his head toward the kitchen. His actions were full of meaning.

Curt Bellew got to his feet, stretched his six-foot frame, smoothed his beard and tramped down heavily on one foot.

"Settin' makes me stiff," he said apologetically. "Got t' move around a little."

He half limped toward the kitchen door.

"Does kinda cramp yuh, Curt," agreed old Buck West.

His wife reached for him, but too late. He didn't look toward her, but followed Curt Bellew.

One by one they complained of inaction and sauntered out.

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"I never seen so many men cravin' exercise," declared Mrs. West. "Ordinarily Buck's a great setter."

The women grinned knowingly at each other. They all knew Uncle Hozie had opened the liquor. Aunt Emma came down the stairs, looking quickly around the room.

"Oh, they're all out in the kitchen, Emmy," said Mrs. Bellew. "Said they was gettin' cramped from settin' around."

"Oh, I s'pose Hozie couldn't wait any longer. He swore he'd get drunk. Said he had to get drunk in order to forget that coat he's got on. But he's been pretty temp'rance for the last year or so, and a little mite of liquor won't hurt him."

"I s'pose it's all right," said Mrs. West dubiously. "How is Peggy?"

"Standin' it right good," said Aunt Emma. "Never seen a prettier bride in my life. Laura Hatton dressed her, and that girl does show good taste, even if she is from the East."

"I never set no great store by Easterners," said Mrs. Bellew. "But Laura's nice. And she's pretty, too. She's sure put the Injun sign on 'Honey' Bee. That boy ain't worth the powder it would take t' blow him to Halifax. This may sound like an exaggeration, but it's as true as I'm settin' here; Honey Bee cut L.H. on the side of my organ."

"No!" exclaimed the chorus.

"Yessir! With his pocket-knife. Carved 'em right into that polished wood. I said, 'My ——, Honey—what'r yuh doin'?'

"He jist kinda jerked back and looked at his knife, like he didn't know. And then he says:

" 'Mrs. Bellew, I begs yore pardon—I thought it was a tree.' "

"He thought it was a tree?" exclaimed Mrs. West.

"Uh-huh. Dreamin', I tell yuh. Thought he was out in the woods."

"Good thing yuh caught him," said Mrs. Selby, a little old lady. "He'd prob'ly put his own initials in it, too."

"Crazier 'n a bedbug!" declared Grandma Owens, whose ninety years allowed her to speak definitely.

"Love, Grandma," said Mrs. Bellew.

"Same thing, Annie. I've watched 'em for ninety year, and they ain't no difference—love and lunacy. Has the preacher come yet?"

"Not yet. Listen!"

From the kitchen came the sound of voices raised in song.

"Wa-a-a-ay do-o-o-on yon-n-n-n-der in the co-o-orn-field."

"Drunk!" said Grandma flatly.

"Drinking," corrected Aunt Emma. "Most of 'em can stand more than Hozie can, and he ain't drunk until he insists on soloin' 'Silver Threads Among the Gold'. Up to that time he can undress himself and hang up his shirt, but when he starts on 'Silver Threads' he can't even take off his own boots."

"I wish they'd quit before Reverend Lake comes," said Mrs. West. "He might not be in accord with such doings."

"Won't he?" Aunt Emma laughed softly. "Henry Lake may be pious, but he ain't Puritanical. If he hears 'em, he'll probably come in through the kitchen. Henry Lake has been givin' us the gospel for twenty-five years, and no man can do that in this country, if he goes too strong against liquor."

"Honey and Joe ought to be showin' up," said Mrs. Bellew.

"Oh, they'll be here in time," laughed Aunt Emma. "This is the first time Joe ever got married, and don't you ever think Honey Bee is goin' to be absent when there's a chance to stand up at a weddin' with Laura Hatton."

Jim Wheeler came in from the kitchen and halted just inside the room. He was a big, gnarled sort of man, with mild blue eyes and an unruly mop of gray hair. His new boots creaked painfully and he seemed ill at ease in his new black suit and rumpled tie. Jim and Uncle Hozie were brothers, and Jim was the father of the bride-to-be.

"Preacher ain't here yet?" asked Jim, drawing out a huge silver watch. "It's almost eight o'clock."

"Oh, he'll be here," assured Aunt Emma. "Peggy looks beautiful, Jim."

"Uh-huh." The big man seemed a trifle sad.

"You don't seem to mind losin' yore daughter, Jim," said Mrs. West. "I remember when Sally got married; Buck cried."

"Prob'ly drunk," said Jim unfeelingly.

"Well, I like that, Jim Wheeler!"

A vision in white came down the stairs and halted near the bottom. It was Laura Hatton, the Easterner, who had come to Pinnacle City to attend the wedding of her old school chum. Laura was a tiny little blonde with big blue eyes and a laughing mouth which dismayed every cowboy in the Tumbling River country—except Honey Bee, who had been christened James Edward Bee.

"Wouldn't you ladies like to come up and see the bride?" she asked. "She's just simply a dream. Why, if I looked as pretty in wedding clothes as Peggy does, I'd turn Mormon."

Jim Wheeler watched them go up the stairs and heard their exclamations of astonishment. Out in the kitchen an improvised quartet was singing "Wait till the clouds roll by, Jennie." Jim Wheeler shook his head sadly.

"Don't seem to mind losing your daughter," he muttered.

Oh, but he did mind it. She would live in her own home. Her mother had been dead ten years. After her death it seemed to Jim Wheeler that nothing could ever fill that void. But Peggy had grown to womanhood, filling the old ranch-house with her joyful presence, and Jim Wheeler had thanked God for a daughter like her. Now she would go away to a home of her own.

"Nobody but me and Wong Lee left," said Wheeler sadly. "And he's only a —— Chinaman."

Some one was knocking on the door, breaking in on Wheeler's thoughts. He opened the door for the minister of the Tumbling River country. Henry Lake was a tall, lean-faced man, near-sighted, dressed in a rusty suit of black. Weddings, funerals or Sunday sermons, he had worn that suit as long as any of them could remember.

He peered closely at Jim Wheeler, shoving out a bony hand.

"Howdy, Jim," he said pleasantly.

"Hello, Henry. Got here at last, eh?"

The minister nodded slowly.

"My old horse isn't as fast as she used to be, Jim. We're both getting old, it seems. But—" he looked at his watch—"I'm near enough on time. Where's everybody?"

"Wimmin are up-stairs with the bride, and the men—" Jim hesitated and glanced toward the kitchen door.

"Carry me-e-e-e ba-a-ack to ol' Virginny," wailed a tenor, while a baritone roared, "While the old mill wheel turns 'round, I'll love you, Ma-a-a-a-ary; when the bee-e-e-e-es—"

And then came the reedy falsetto of Hozie Wheeler—

"Da-a-a-arling, I am growing o-o-o-old."

The minister nodded slowly.

"The perfectly natural reaction, Jim. The sentiment contained in corn and rye."

"Like a little shot, Henry?"

"Not now, Jim; later, perhaps. Is the groom here yet?"

"Not yet. Him and Honey ought to be here any minute now."

The women were coming back down the stairs, and the minister went to shake hands with them. Aunt Emma cocked one ear toward the kitchen, and a look of consternation crossed her face. She grasped Jim by the arm and whispered in his ear:

"Shake Hozie loose, Jim! He's silver-threadin' already."

Jim nodded and went to the kitchen.

And while the Flying H resounded with good cheer, while more guests arrived and while Peggy Wheeler waited—Honey Bee buzzed angrily about Pinnacle City. Honey had just arrayed himself in a blue made-to-order suit, patent-leather shoes and a brown derby hat. Everything had come with the suit, and Honey cursed the tailor for having acute astigmatism.

The pants were a full six inches too short and at least that much too big around the waist. Honey managed to squeeze a number eight foot into the number six shoe. And the hat should have been a seven and one-quarter, instead of a six and seven-eighths.

Honey Bee was a medium-sized youth of twenty-five, with tow-colored hair, shading to a roan at the ends, blue eyes, tilted nose and a large mouth. The blue eyes were large and inquiring and the mouth grinned at everything. Honey was a top-hand cowboy, even if he was somewhat of a dreamer.

But just now there was no smile on Honey's mouth. He had hired a horse and buggy from the livery-stable and had tied the horse in front of the sheriff's office. It just happened that Joe Rich, the sheriff, was going to marry Peggy Wheeler, and had promised Honey to meet him at the office at half-past seven.

Every cowboy in the Tumbling River range envied Joe. Never had there been a lovelier girl than Peggy Wheeler, and none of the boys would admit that Joe was worthy of her.

"It's a love match, pure and simple," Honey had declared. "Peggy's pure and Joe's simple."

But just now Honey was calling Joe stronger things than simpleton. It was nearing eight o'clock, and no Joe in sight. The office was closed. Len Kelsey, Joe's deputy, was out at the Flying H, probably drinking more than was good for him.

Honey didn't like Len. Possibly it was because Honey thought that Joe should have appointed him as deputy. And it is barely possible that Joe would have appointed Honey, except that, in order to swing a certain element, he had made a pre-election promise to appoint Len.

Joe was barely twenty-three years of age. Too young, many of the old-timers said, to be a sheriff of Tumbling River. But Joe won the election. He was a slender young man, slightly above the average in height, with a thin, handsome face, keen gray eyes and a firm mouth. He had been foreman of the Flying H, and Uncle Hozie had mourned the passing of a capable cowhand.

"Plumb ruined," declared the old man. "Never be worth a —— for anythin' agin'. County offices has ruined more men than liquor and cards."

Honey Bee sat in the buggy, resting his shining feet across the dashboard in order to lessen the pain. The coat was a little tight across the shoulders, and Honey wondered whether the tucks would show where he had gathered in the waistband of the trousers. His cartridge-belt made a decided bulge under his tight vest, but he had no other belt; and no cowboy would ever lower himself to wear suspenders. They were the insignia of a farmer.

"I wish I knowed what kind of a figure that —— tailor had in mind when he built this here suit," said Honey to himself. "I know —— well I measured myself accurately. I might 'a' slipped a little on some of it, bein' as I had to do a little stoopin'; but never as much as this shows. Now, where in —— is Joe Rich?"

It was eight o'clock by Honey's watch. He got out of the buggy and almost fell down. His feet had gone to sleep. And when he made a sudden grab for the buggy wheel he heard a slight rip in the shoulder-seam of his coat.

"My ——, I'm comin' apart!" he grunted.

Honey had not seen Joe since about five o'clock, and something seemed to tell him that everything was not right. Joe slept in the office. He and Len Kelsey were

together the last time Honey had seen them, and Joe said he was going to get a shave. But the barber shop was closed now.

Honey limped around to Joe's stable and found Joe's horse there. Then he went back to the buggy. It was after eight now, and the wedding was scheduled for eight-thirty. It was over two miles to the Flying H from Pinnacle City and Honey knew that the buggy horse was not a fast stepper.

Honey swore dismally and stood on one foot. He needed a big drink to kill the pain. Across the street was the Pinnacle bar, the most popular saloon in town. There was sure to be several men in there and they would be sure to make some remarks about Honey's clothes.

Farther down the street was the Arapaho bar. Honey did not like the place. "Limpy" Nelson owned the Arapaho, and Honey did not like Limpy. But Honey knew that no one would make remarks about his appearance down there, because Honey's friends frequented the Pinnacle—and friends were the only ones entitled to make remarks.

So Honey stifled his pride and went to the Arapaho, where he leaned against the bar. Old Limpy was the only person there, except a drunk sprawled across a card-table near the rear of the place.

Limpy squinted at Honey and shifted his eyes toward the back of the room as he slid the glasses across the bar.

"Didn't somebody say that the sheriff was gittin' married t'night?" asked Limpy.

Honey poured out his drink and looked at it wearily. Lifting the glass, he looked critically at it.

"Yeah," he said slowly. "I'm waitin' for him."

"That's him back there," Limpy pointed toward the rear.

"Eh?" Honey jerked around, staring. "What's that, Limpy?"

"Joe Rich. Drunk as an owl."

"For ——'s sake!" Honey dropped his glass and limped back to the table where Joe Rich sprawled. He slapped Joe on the shoulder, swearing foolishly.

"Joe! Joe, you —— fool! Wake up, can'tcha?"

But Joe merely grunted heavily. He was still wearing the clothes he had worn when Honey saw him last, and he had not shaved.

Dead drunk on his marriage night! Honey sagged weakly against the table, speechless. He could visualize all those people out at the Flying H, waiting for them. He shoved away from the table and looked at Limpy.

"My God, this is awful, Limpy! He was to get married at eight-thirty. It's almost that right now, and look at him!"

"Pretty drunk," nodded Limpy.

"Dead t' the world! Who'd he get drunk with?"

"Alone, I reckon. He was shore polluted when he came here. Got a couple more with Len and went to sleep back there."

Honey groaned painfully. Joe reeked of whisky.

"Oh, you —— fool!" wailed Honey. "Joe, can'tcha wake up? Let's go for a walk. Joe! A-a-a-aw, you drunken bum!"

Two men came in and walked up to the bar. They were Ed Merrick and Ben Collins. Merrick owned the Circle M outfit, and Ben was one of his cowboys. Merrick had been the one who supported Joe Rich and had asked Joe to appoint Len Kelsey deputy. Len had worked for the Circle M for several years.

They came back and looked at Joe.

"And this is his weddin' night!" wailed Honey.

"For —— sake!" snorted Merrick disgustedly. "He was goin' to marry Peggy Wheeler."

"Loaded to the gills," declared Ben. "He's shore a —— of a fine specimen for sheriff."

"Yuh can throw that in a can!" snapped Honey. "Since when did the Circle M start judgin' morals?"

Evidently Ben did not know; so he shut his mouth.

"What are yuh goin' to do?" asked Merrick.

"Put him to bed. My ——, I can't take him out to the Flyin' H. Joe! You brainless idiot, wake up!"

"We better help yuh, Honey," said Merrick. "He's plumb floppy."

Honey managed to get the office key from Joe's pocket, and between the three of them they managed to carry Joe back to his office, where they put him on his bed.

"What'll yuh do about it?" asked Merrick when they came out.

"God only knows, Merrick!" wailed

Honey. "I can't go out there and say he's drunk. Oh, why didn't the —— fool get shot, or somethin'? I—I—aw ——, I've got to go out there. I hope to —— the horse runs away and breaks my neck. But there ain't much hopes," dismally. "These Pinnacle livery horses never did run away from home. Well, I—thanks for helpin' me put him to bed."

Honey limped out, untied the horse and got into the buggy.

"I'd rather go to a funeral any old time," he told the horse as they left town." By ——, I'd rather go to my own funeral. But it can't be helped; I've got to tell 'em."

It is not difficult to imagine the frame of mind of those at the Flying H when eight-thirty passed and no sign of the groom and best man. The aged minister paced up and down the veranda, trying to make himself believe that everything was all right.

Down by the big gate stood Jim Wheeler, a dim figure beneath the hanging lantern. All hilarity had ceased in the kitchen. Uncle Hozie was seated in the living-room between Aunt Emma and Grandma Owens, grinning widely at nothing whatever.

Up-stairs in a bedroom were Peggy Wheeler and Laura Hatton. An old clock on a dresser ticked loudly, its hands pointing at a quarter of nine. Peggy sat on a bed, her hands folded in her lap. She was a decided brunette, taller than Laura, brown-eyed; well entitled to the honor of being the most beautiful girl in the Tumbling River country.

There were tears in her brown eyes, and she bit her lip as Laura turned from the front window, shaking her blond head.

"Nobody in sight, Peggy. I just can't understand it."

Peggy shook her head. She couldn't trust herself to talk just now. Aunt Emma came slowly up the stairs and looked in at Peggy.

"I'll betcha the buggy broke down," she said. "They'll both come walkin' in pretty soon. Peggy, you dry them tears. Joe's all right. Yuh can't tell what's happened. Bein' the sheriff, he might have been called at the last minute. The law don't wait on marriages. You just wait and see, Peggy."

"Oh, I hope everything is all right," sighed Peggy. "He's twenty minutes late right now, Aunt Emma."

Still they did not come. Some of the cowboys volunteered to ride back to Pinnacle City to see what the trouble might be, when the long-looked-for buggy hove in sight. They could see it far down the road in the moonlight. Laura had seen it from the bedroom window and came running back to Peggy.

"Good gracious, stand up, Peggy!" she exclaimed. "Your gown is all wrinkled. They're coming at last. Heavens, your cheeks are all tear-streaked! No, don't wipe them! You little goose, why did you shed all those tears?"

"Well, what would you have done?" laughed Peggy, allowing Laura to smooth her gown.

"I wouldn't cry, that's a sure thing."

She darted back to the window, flinging the curtain aside.

"They've stopped at the gate," she said. "I think they are talking to your father. Now he's coming with them."

Aunt Emma came running up the stairs, calling to Peggy.

"They're here," she called. "Goodness knows, it's time."

"I'm ready, Aunt Emma," called Peggy.

Laura still stood at the window, watching the buggy come up to the veranda. But only Honey Bee got out of the buggy. He was talking to Jim Wheeler and forgot to tie the horse. Then they came into the house. A babel of questions assailed Honey, but Jim Wheeler's heavy voice silenced them. Came several moments of silence. Laura had stepped back beside Peggy, who was listening.

"There ain't goin' to be no weddin'," said Jim Wheeler slowly. "Joe Rich is dead drunk."

A silence followed Jim's announcement. Peggy looked at Laura, and the blood slowly drained from her cheeks. She grasped for the foot of the bed to steady herself. Then came Honey's voice:

"Aw, —— it, don't look at me thataway!" he wailed. "This wasn't anythin' I could help. I was to meet him at seven-thirty, and he didn't show up; so I waited until after eight. Then I found him in the Arapaho saloon—asleep."

Aunt Emma was coming up the stairs, bringing the news to Peggy. She didn't realize that Peggy had heard all of it. They met at the top of the stairs, and Peggy went past her, clinging to the railing.

Aunt Emma touched her on the arm, but Peggy did not look up. At the top of the stairs stood Laura, her eyes wide, the tears running down her cheeks.

Peggy went into the living-room and stopped just inside the doorway. The minister caught sight of her and crossed the room, but she brushed him aside.

"Honey," she said breathlessly, "is that all true?"

Honey Bee shifted his weight to one foot, nodding jerkily.

"My ——, I wouldn't lie to yuh, Peggy!" he said. "It shore is —— to have to tell the truth in a case like this. All the way from town I've tried to frame up a lie, but it wasn't no use, Peggy. Mebbe it was my feet. A feller with an eight foot can't think of no lies in a six shoe."

Peggy's eyes swept the assemblage of old friends, and their faces seemed blurred. No one spoke. Her father stood beside her, grim-faced, stunned.

"I'm sorry," said Peggy simply, and went back toward the stairs.

Slowly the crowd gathered up their belongings and went away. Even Uncle Hozie was shocked to sobriety. Finally there was no one left in the big living-room except Honey Bee. He took off his shoes and coat and was going toward the front door when Laura Hatton came down the stairs. She had been crying.

Honey stared at her and she stared at Honey.

"Huh-howdy," said Honey, bobbing his head. "Nice weather."

Then he tried to bow, and the effort pulled the waist-band of his pants away from his belt. He made a quick grab, and saved the day.

"Oh, why did you have to come and tell her a thing like that?" asked Laura. "Why didn't you lie like a gentleman?"

"Lie like a gentleman?" Honey stared at her, his hands clutching the coat, shoes and waistline.

"Yes—lie!" said Laura fiercely. "You could have told that Joe had to chase horse-thieves, or something like that."

"Uh-huh," grunted Honey. "Well, yeah, I could."

"Well, why didn't you?"

"Them's why!" Honey flung down the offending shoes. "By ——, yuh can't be pretty and smart at the same time! Folks say that brains are in yore head, but they're not. They're in yore feet, I tell yuh! Pinch yore feet and yuh can't think. That's why I had to tell the truth."

"I suppose so," said Laura sadly. "Perhaps it is all for the best. You better go home, Mr. Bee; you're half undressed."

"Half?" gasped Honey. "If anythin' makes me let loose—I'm all undressed! Good night."

Honey climbed into his buggy and drove back to Pinnacle City, sadder and wiser, as far as clothes were concerned. The outfit had cost him forty dollars. He sat down on the brown derby when he got into the seat, but he was too disgusted to move off it.

He turned the horse over to the stableman and went to the Pinnacle Saloon in his sock-feet, carrying his coat. Some of the men who had been at the Flying H were at the saloon, having a drink before going home. Len Kelsey, the deputy, was there. Len was a tall skinny, swarthy young man, inclined to be boastful of his own abilities.

"You seen Joe?" asked Honey.

Len shook his head.

"Mebbe we better go over and see how he's comin' along," suggested Honey.

They walked over to the office and found Joe still on the bed, snoring heavily. He opened his eyes when Honey shook the bed, and looked around in a bewildered way.

"Whazamatter?" he asked thickly.

"When yuh sober up, you'll find out," growled Honey. "You shore raised —— and put a chunk under it tonight, pardner."

"Huh?"

Joe lifted himself on one elbow and stared at the lamp. He blinked owlishly and looked at Honey. Joe's eyes were bloodshot and he breathed jerkily.

"Whatcha mean?" he asked.

"Do you know what night this is?" asked Honey.

Joe squinted one eye thoughtfully.

"What night? What—" he sank back on the pillow and shut his eyes.

"Pretty sick," observed Len. "Better let him sleep it off."

"Oh, I suppose," said Honey.

He threw some covers over Joe and they went out together, after turning the lamp down low.

But Joe did not go back to sleep. His head ached and his throat was so dry he could hardly swallow. Finally he got out

of bed and staggered over to the table, where he turned up the lamp.

For several minutes he stood against the table, rubbing his head and trying to puzzle things out. On a chair near the bed was a white shirt and collar, gleaming white in the light of the lamp. On the floor was a new pair of shoes.

Suddenly the mist lifted from Joe's brain and he remembered. It came to him like an electric shock. He was to be married!

He stumbled to the door and flung it open. It was dark out there, the street deserted. Wonderingly he looked at his watch.

Eleven o'clock!

Slowly he went back to the bed and sat down, holding his head in his hands. What night was it? he wondered. Was it the night of his marriage—or the night before? No, it couldn't be the night before. He remembered everything. And now he remembered that Honey was wearing a white collar. Nothing but a marriage or a funeral would cause Honey to wear a white collar.

He felt nauseated, dry-throated. What had he done? There was a light in the Pinnacle Saloon; so he went over there. The cool night air revived him a little, but his legs did not track very well.

Honey and Len were at the bar, talking with the bartender, when Joe came in.

"Gosh, you shore look like the breakin' up of a hard winter, pardner," observed Honey.

Joe came up to the bar and hooked one elbow over the polished top. He wanted to sit down, but forced himself to stand.

"Honey," he said hoarsely, "what night is this?"

"What night? Joe, you —— fool, this was yore weddin' night!"

Joe sagged visibly and Honey caught him by the arm.

"You better set down," advised Len.

Joe allowed Honey to lead him to a chair, where he slumped weakly, staring wide-eyed at Honey.

"My weddin' night?" he whispered. "Honey, don't lie to me!"

"Nobody lyin' to yuh, Joe."

Joe slid down in the chair, his face the color of wood ashes. He lifted his right hand almost to his face, but let it fall to his knee.

"Don't lie, Honey!" It was a weak whisper. There was still hope left.

"I ain't lyin', Joe," said Honey sadly. "Good God, I wish I was! Len was there; he can tell yuh. I waited for yuh, like I said I would, Joe. But you never showed up. It was after eight o'clock when I went huntin' yuh, and —— yore hide, I found yuh in the Arapaho, drunk as a boiled owl."

"Drunk as a boiled owl," whispered Joe.

"Y'betcha. I couldn't take yuh, Joe. ——, I'd do anythin' for yuh, and you know it; but I couldn't take yuh out there thataway, so I put yuh to bed."

Joe groaned painfully.

"They—they were out there—everybody, Honey?"

"Everybody, Joe. I tried to think up a lie to tell 'em, but my feet hurt so —— bad that I couldn't even think. I had to tell, 'em the truth. It was nine o'clock. Aw, it was awful."

Joe had sunk down in the chair, breathing like a runner who had just finished a hard race.

"I seen Peggy," said Honey. "My ——, but she was beautiful! And you hurt her, Joe. I could tell she was hurt bad, but she jist said she was sorry."

"Oh, my God, don't!"

Joe lurched out of the chair, panting, hands clenched. Suddenly he flung his hands up to his eyes.

"Oh, what have I done? I don't understand it. I must have been crazy. Am I crazy now—or dreaming? No, I'm not dreamin'; so I must be crazy. Dead drunk on my weddin'—oh, what's the matter with the world, anyway?"

He stood in the middle of the saloon, his eyes shut, his face twisted with the pain of it all. He stumbled forward and would have fallen had not Honey grasped him.

"You better go and sleep on it, pardner," advised Honey.

"Sleep? With this on my mind?"

"Well, yuh got drunk with it on yore mind."

"Aw, don't rub it in on him," said the bartender. "Better have a drink, Joe. You sure need bracin'."

"He don't need any more drinks," declared Honey. "Good gosh, he plumb reeks of it yet. What he needs is sleep."

"Sleep?" Joe smiled crookedly. "Oh, what can I do. I feel like I was all dead, except my mind."

"Come out to the ranch with me, Joe," urged Honey.

"And face the Bellew family?"

"You've got to face 'em all, sooner or later, Joe."

"I suppose that's true! Honey, what did they say? What did they do?"

"What could they do, Joe? I don't think they said much. I know Peggy didn't. They jist acted like they was stunned. It was worse 'n a funeral."

"Hozie was drunk, and it sobered him," offered Len.

"Poor old Hozie," said Joe. "All my friends—once."

"Aw, they'll get over it, Joe," said Honey. "They all like you awful well."

"Did like me, Honey. Oh, I'm all through. I may not have any brains, but in spite of what I've done, I've got some pride left. I can't face 'em. I know what they're saying!

"'Drunken bum! Drunken bum!' Oh, I know it, Honey. No matter whether I'm guilty or not, I'll always be the drunken bum who forgot his own weddin'. Is there anybody or anythin' lower than I am?"

"You could put on a plug-hat and walk under a snake's belly," said Honey unfeelingly. "I'm not upholdin' yuh, cowboy. Far be it from me to interrupt yuh when yuh start sayin' mean things about yourself; but that don't alter the fact that I'm yore friend, and I ask yuh to come out to the bunk-house and sleep yourself into a sane frame of mind. Right now yo're as crazy as a locoed calf."

Joe shook his head.

"Thank yuh, Honey, but I'm goin' to saddle my horse and see if the wind will straighten me out. I'm sick as a fool, and I've got a lot of thinkin' to do."

Joe lurched out of the saloon and stumbled across the street, heading for his stable. Honey shook his head sadly and went back to the bar.

"He's shore sufferin'," said the bartender.

"Yeah, he is," nodded Honey sadly. "He's gittin' all the hell a man ever gits. Yuh don't have to die a sinner to get punished, I happen to know. Some gits it right here."

"Have you suffered?" asked the bartender.

"What in —— do yuh think I'm runnin' around in my socks for? I'll say I've suffered. Let's have one more drink."

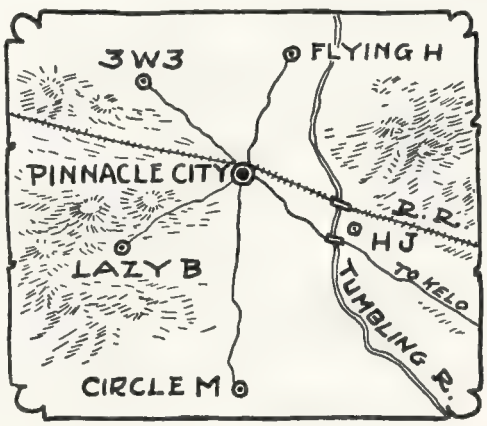
CHAPTER II

"HANGING IS TOO GOOD—"

PINNACLE CITY was the oldest settlement in the Tumbling River country and had always been the county seat since the boundary lines had been drawn. Originally the place had been only a small settlement and the houses had been built along a wagon-road. And as the place grew larger this road became the main street, with very little added to the original width. In several places the road had twisted to avoid a mud-hole, and the main street was consequently very crooked.

But Pinnacle City had never become a metropolis. It was still the small cow-town; muddy in winter, dusty in summer, with poorly made wooden sidewalks which followed the contour of the ground fairly closely. The railroad had added little to Pinnacle City except a brick-red depot, warehouse and some loading corrals.

Eighteen miles southeast was the town of Kelo, and twelve miles northwest was the



town of Ransome. Tumbling River ran southwest, cutting straight through the center of the valley. A short distance west of Pinnacle City were the high pinnacles of the Tumbling range, which gave the town its name. Barbed-wire had never made its appearance in the Tumbling River range, feed was good and there was plenty of water.

Five outfits ranged their stock in the Pinnacle City end of the Tumbling River range, the farthest away from town being Ed Merrick's Circle M, located about eight

miles due south. Midway between the town and the Circle M, and just on the east bank of Tumbling River, was Jim Wheeler's HJ ranch.

Southwest, about three miles from town, was Curt Bellew's Lazy B. This was on the west side of the river. A little less than three miles to the northeast of Pinnacle City was Uncle Hozie Wheeler's Flying H; and four miles northwest of town was Buck West's 3W3 outfit.

Jim Wheeler's ranch was just between the wagon road and the railroad, on the way to Kelo. The two bridges were less than half a mile apart. Jim Wheeler's wife had died when Peggy was a little slip of a girl, but Jim had kept his ranch and raised his daughter, aided and abetted by Aunt Emma Wheeler, who had wanted to raise her. The HJ was a small ranch. Jim had been content to run a few cattle and horses. Wong Lee, the Chinese cook, had been with the HJ for years, and Jim swore that the county had always assessed Wong as personal property of the HJ.

Uncle Hozie Wheeler's Flying H was a larger outfit, employing three cowboys, Lonnie Myers, Dan Leach and "Nebrasky" Jones, known as the "Heavenly Triplets," possibly because there was nothing heavenly about any of them. Lonnie was a loud-talking boy from the Milk River country; Dan Leach hailed from eastern Oregon, and Nebrasky's cognomen disclosed the State of his nativity. Uncle Hozie called them his debating society and entered into their State arguments in favor of Arizona.

Curt Bellew's Lazy B supported three cowboys: Eph Harper, "Slim" Coleman and Honey Bee. Mrs. Bellew contended that the ranch could be handled with one man, but that Curt wanted to match Hozie Wheeler in numbers. She pointed out the fact that Buck West could run his 3W3 outfit with only two men, Jimmy Black and Abe Liston, just because Buck wasn't so lazy he couldn't do some of the work himself. Which of course was a gentle hint that Curt might do more himself.

The Circle M ranged more stock than any of the other ranches and only carried three men besides Ed Merrick. Ben Collins, "Dutch" Siebert and Jack Ralston made up the personnel of the Circle M, since Len Kelsey had left them to take up his duties as deputy sheriff under Joe Rich.

IT WAS the morning following the wedding which had not taken place that Joe Rich rode up to the Flying H. All night long he had ridden across the hills, fighting out with himself to decide what to do, and he was a sorry-looking young man when he drew rein near the veranda of the Flying H ranch-house. He had ridden away without coat, hat or chaps. His trouser-legs were torn from riding past brush, his face scratched, his hair disheveled.

Uncle Hozie saw him from the window and came down to him. Lonnie Myers and Nebrasky were at the corral, saddling their horses. They merely glanced in his direction, recognizing him, but paying no attention. Uncle Hozie looked Joe over critically, but said nothing.

"Well, why don't yuh say somethin'?" demanded Joe wearily. "My ——, Hozie, don't just stand there! Swear at me, if yuh feel thataway."

Uncle Hozie shook his head slowly and sighed. He had drunk a little too much the night before, and his spirits were not overly bright. A tin can rattled loudly, and they looked toward the stable, where Dan Leach was throwing out the stuff they had stacked in the stall for the shivaree.

Joe's eyes closed tightly for a moment and he turned his head away. He knew what those noise producers had been meant for. A cow-bell clattered among the cans. Lonnie and Nebrasky were watching Joe from the corral.

"I don't feel like cussin' anybody," said Uncle Hozie.

"Not even me?" asked Joe.

"You? Nope. What'sa use, Joe? If yuh cuss folks before they do wrong it might do some good. Afterward, it's no use. Yuh can't wipe out what a man writes in the book of fate, Joe."

"And I shore wrote a page last night, Hozie."

"Yea-a-ah, I'd tell a man yuh did, Joe." Uncle Hozie cocked one eye and looked at Joe.

"There's by actual count, seventeen —— fools in this Tumblin' River range—and yo're all of 'em, Joe."

"I admit it, Hozie."

"You do? My ——, you didn't think for a minute yuh could deny it, didja? Huh! Why don'tcha git down? My ——, I hate to talk to a man on a horse! Especially the mornin' after. Kinda hurts my eyes to look up."

Joe shook his head.

"No, I can't stay, Hozie."

"Nobody asked yuh to, did they?"

"No. Is Peggy here yet?"

"No, she ain't, Joe," softly. "They went home last night—her and Jim and Laura Hatton. Jim thought it was best. Emma tried to get 'em to stay a while, but they kinda wanted to be at home, where there wouldn't be anybody to ask questions."

"To ask questions!" echoed Joe. "That's the worst of it."

"I dunno," sighed Hozie. "It's the first weddin' I ever seen that raveled right out thataway. Honey Bee showed up with his coat in one hand and his shoes in the other. He shore was the worst-lookin' best man I ever seen."

"Poor old Honey."

"Yeah, yuh ought to feel sorry for somebody, Joe. I don't sabe yuh; by ——, I don't! I thought I knew yuh, but I reckon I don't. I ain't said what I think about yuh to anybody. Mebbe I ain't had no chance; so many folks has said what they thought about it that I've kinda got their ideas and mine all tangled up. Mebbe after while I'll git my own ideas straightened up to where I know they'r all mine, I'll look 'em over."

"I suppose they'd like to hang me, Hozie."

"Hang yuh? Huh! Reminds me of a Dutchman I knowed. He runs into a gang of punchers that was goin' to lynch a horse thief. Dutchy runs into 'em, and asks what it's all about.

" 'Vat iss it all about?' asks Dutchy.

" 'Goin' to hang a horse thief,' says a puncher.

" 'Oh, dot's too bad,' says Dutchy. 'You shouldn't hang a man for stealing von horse.'

" 'It was yore horse, Dutchy.'

" 'So-o-o-o? Don't hang him; dot's too good for him. Let me kick him in de pants.' "

Joe smiled bitterly.

"Do you think hangin' is too good for me, Hozie?" he asked.

"I don't say it is, Joe; but when I got a look at Peggy last night I shore wanted to give yuh some of the Dutchman's medicine."

Joe wiped the back of his hand across his cheek and wet his lips with a dry tongue.

"I reckon I'm all through in Tumblin' River, Hozie."

"Well," Uncle Hozie bit off a huge chew of tobacco and masticated rapidly, thoughtfully. "Well, Joe, it ain't for me to say. I got up as far as 'Silver Threads' last night myself, but of course it wasn't my weddin' night. But, accordin' to some remarks I heard expressed last night, the folks of the Tumblin' River ain't takin' up no collection to buy yuh a monument. Yuh see, Joe, Peggy is kinda well liked."

"Kinda well liked! My ——!" Joe shut his jaw tightly and fumbled at his reins. "I'll be goin', Hozie."

"Yeah? Well." Hozie spat thoughtfully, but did not look up at Joe.

"Be good to yourself," he said slowly.

Joe turned and rode away, never looking back. Hozie sat down on the veranda and Aunt Emma came out. She had been watching from a window.

"What did he have to say?" she asked.

"Joe? Oh, nothin' much."

"What excuse did he offer?"

"None."

"Didn't deny bein' drunk?"

"Didn't mention it."

"Feel sorry about it, Hozie?"

"Didn't say."

"Well, what in the world did you two talk about?"

"Public opinion."

Aunt Emma snorted.

"Public opinion, eh? Did you tell him what you thought of him?"

"Nope; wasn't quite clear in my own mind, Emma."

"I suppose not. If Jim hadn't stopped yuh last night—"

"Oh, I know," Hozie smiled softly. "My voice was kinda good, too. Curt Bellew said he never heard me sing so well."

"Curt was drunk, too."

"Thasso. Prob'ly accounts for him likin' my voice. I'd like to sing to a sober man some day and get an honest opinion."

"No sober man would listen to you, Hozie."

"I s'pose not," Uncle Hozie sighed deeply. "I suppose it's jist sort of a drunken bond between inebriates that makes me feel sorry for Joe Rich, Emma; but I do. He looked so doggone helpless and lonesome this mornin'. No, I didn't tell him I felt sorry. He don't deserve sympathy."

"He don't deserve anythin'," declared Aunt Emma.

"Hangin'—mebbe."

"And you feel sorry for him?"

"I want to, Emma," Uncle Hozie turned and looked at her. "I've worked with that boy a lot. Me and him have rubbed knees on some hard rides, and I kinda looked on Joe like I would on my own son. He was straight and square—until now, Emma. Mebbe," he hesitated for a moment, "mebbe I'm feelin' sorry for the Joe Rich of yesterday."

"Well, that's different, Hozie," said Aunt Emma softly, and went back in the house. She had thought a lot of Joe Rich of yesterday, too.

Joe rode back to Pinnacle City and stabled his tired horse. He had spent all his savings for a little four-room house on the outskirts of Pinnacle and had gone in debt for the furnishings. It was to have been their home.

Len Kelsey was asleep in the office when Joe came in and sat down at his desk. He woke up and looked curiously at Joe.

"Wondered where yuh was, Joe," he said sleepily.

"Yeah?"

Joe drew out a sheet of paper, dipped a pen in the ink bottle and began writing. Kelsey turned over and went to sleep again.

Joe finished writing, folded the paper and walked out of the office. Just south of his office was the old two-story frame-building court-house, and as Joe started to enter the front door he met Jim Wheeler and Angus McLaren, chairman of the board of county commissioners.

McLaren was a big, raw-boned Scot who owned a general store in Kelo. McLaren, Ed Merrick and Ross Layton, of Ransome, composed the board of commissioners.

Joe Rich stopped short as he faced Jim Wheeler. For possibly five seconds the HJ cattleman stared at the sheriff of Tumbling River, and then, without a word, he struck Joe square in the face, knocking him out through the doorway, where Joe went to his haunches on the sidewalk, dazed, bleeding from his nose and mouth.

Quickly the big Scotsman stepped in front of Wheeler, grasping him with both hands.

"Stop it, Jim!" he ordered.

Wheeler stepped back, his face crimson with anger, but saying nothing.

Joe did not get up, nor did he even look at Wheeler, who stepped past McLaren and went slowly up the street.

"Are ye hurt much, Joe?" asked McLaren not unkindly. He knew all about what had happened the night before.

Joe did not reply. He got slowly to his feet and leaned against the building, while he drew out the folded sheet of paper. Then he unpinned the silver star from the bosom of his soiled shirt, pinned it to the sheet of paper and handed it to McLaren. Then he turned and went slowly down the street.

McLaren stared after him. Joe Rich staggered slightly, but he was not drunk. McLaren unfolded the paper and read it carefully. It was Joe's resignation, written to the board of county commissioners. McLaren put it in his pocket.

"Life's queer," said the big Scot thoughtfully. "Yesterday he was Joe Rich, sheriff of Tumblin' River, the luckiest young man in the world. And today—nobody! Ye never know yer luck, so ye don't; and who has the right to judge him?"

He turned and went back to his office.

Joe staggered off the main street and went down through an alley. He wanted to get off the street; to be where no one would talk to him. Strangely enough he felt no pain from the blow. Except for the fact that his face was bleeding, he was not aware he had been hurt.

The thought of Jim Wheeler knocking him down hurt worse than any blow, and he moved along blindly; not going anywhere—just away from everybody. He did not realize where he was until he heard a voice speak his name.

He was standing beside a picket-fence, and there was Honey Bee, holding the reins of his horse. The picket-fence was the one around Joe's house; the one Aunt Emma had called "Honeymoon Home."

"I seen yuh cuttin' across this way," explained Honey. "My ——, yuh shore got an awful lookin' face on yuh, cowboy. Horse kick yuh?"

Joe shook his head. He didn't want to talk with Honey Bee, but he knew there was no chance of getting away from him. Honey was tying his horse to the fence, and now he came over to Joe.

"Mebbe we better go in the house, Joe," he said. "Yuh got to wash off that blood."

Joe nodded and followed Honey to the house. It was not locked. Folks did not lock their houses in the Tumbling River country. Honey filled a basin with water

and found a towel. Honey was rather rough but effective.

"Yo're a —— of a lookin' thing," he declared.

"Thasall right," mumbled Joe. "Thanks, Honey."

Joe slumped back in a rocking-chair and closed his eyes, while Honey put away the basin and towel.

"I'm wonderin' what the other feller looks like," said Honey, as he manufactured a cigaret.

"Jim Wheeler," said Joe.

"The ——! Did Jim Wheeler hit yuh, Joe?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I'll be ——! Jim Wheeler! What did he say, Joe?"

"Nothin'. Wasn't anythin' to be said."

"Uh-huh. Makes it kinda hard for yuh, cowboy. Anyway, yuh had to meet him sooner or later. Ain'tcha goin' out to see Peggy?"

"No, I can't do that, Honey."

"I s'pose not. I was past there today—this mornin'. Saw Laura. Didn't sleep none, I reckon. She's a darned pretty girl, but this mornin' her eyes shore looked like two burned holes in a blanket. I pulled off an awful fox pass last night. I took off my coat and shoes, 'cause I shore was in misery, and then Laura comes hoppin' in on me. I has to make my little bow, and my belt missed connections with my pants. Na-a-aw, I saved myself, all right; but it shore needed quick action. Either that tailor is awful cock-eyed, or I'm a queer built jigger."

"You didn't see Peggy?" asked Joe softly.

"Nope. I asked Laura how she was, and Laura asks me how any other girl would be under them conditions. If I was you, I'd go out and have a talk with her. But not the way yuh look now, Joe. Rest up a while. Let Len Kelsey run the office for a few days."

"I resigned this mornin', Honey."

"Yuh resigned? Yuh mean you've quit bein' sheriff? Aw, ——, why didja do that? You —— idjit! Throwin' up a job like that. Ho-o-o-o—hum-m-m-m! Joe, yo're a —— fool"

"In every way, Honey."

"A-a-aw, I didn't mean it thataway, Joe. You know me. I'd go to —— and half way back for you, and you know it. But you've shore dug yourself an awful hole, and you'll never git out by quittin' thataway. Laura is tryin' to get Peggy to go home with her for a while. She'll prob'ly have one awful time convincin' Jim Wheeler that it's the best thing for Peggy to do—but Laura is shore convincin'."

"You mean that Peggy would go East, Honey?"

"Yeah, sure. She's got friends back there; folks she knew where she went to school with Laura. Mebbe it's the best thing for her to do. Jim ain't got a lot of money, but he can afford it, I reckon. What do you figure on doin', Joe?"

"Oh, I don't know, Honey. I can't make up my mind to anythin'. I just run in circles, and every way I turn there's a blank wall; no way out."

"Yeah, I s'pose so. Let's go and buy a drink."

Joe shook his head.

"I don't think I'll ever want another drink of liquor, Honey. I'm goin' to sleep a while, and mebbe I can think my way clear."

Honey came past the court-house and saw Jim Wheeler, Angus McLaren, Ed Merrick and Ross Layton just going into the place. They were going to consider the resignation of Joe Rich, and it did not take them long to decide on an acceptance.

Ross Layton was a saloon owner in Ransome. He was rather small, slightly gray, and affected flowing ties and fancy vests. The rest of his raiment was rather somber, a fact which had caused Honey Bee to remark—

"Looks like a —— bouquet of flowers wrapped up in crêpe."

There was no argument over the appointment of Len Kelsey as the successor of Joe Rich, and it was up to Len to pick his own deputy. They went from the court-house to the sheriff's office, where they told Len of his good fortune. The skinny-faced deputy grinned widely and accepted his honors. As the three men were leaving Len said to Merrick—

"Send Jack in to see me, Ed."

"All right, Len," nodded Merrick.

Len and Jack Ralston had been bunkies at the Circle M, and it would be the natural thing for Len to appoint Jack as his deputy.

McLaren had some business to attend to at the Pinnacle City bank, so he left Merrick and Wheeler together. Layton had left them at the sheriff's office.

"It's sure funny how things change," observed Merrick.

The owner of the Circle M was slightly under forty years of age, above medium height. He was rather good-looking and dressed well. However, he looked more like a gambler than a county official and a solid citizen. Perhaps this aspect was enhanced by the fact that he shaved regularly, kept his black mustache trimmed and waxed to needle-like points, and wore pants instead of overalls.

"I was thinkin' about Joe Rich," said Merrick.

Jim Wheeler shoved his hands deep in his pockets and did not lift his eyes from serious contemplation of his own boot-toes.

"I wanted to talk to yuh, Merrick," he said slowly. "This sure has been a blow to me. Laura Hatton wants Peggy to go home with her. I dunno—mebbe's it's the best thing to do. I don't mind layin' my cards on the table."

Jim Wheeler looked up at Merrick.

"I owe the Pinnacle City bank seven thousand dollars and I can't ask 'em for any more, Merrick."

"Uh-huh." Merrick did not seem impressed.

"You know what the HJ ranch is, Merrick. Seven thousand is a lot of money against it. I've got to have another thousand, if I send Peggy back with Laura."

"Well, I might let yuh have it, Jim. Bank got a mortgage?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I'll take your note. How soon do yuh need it?"

"Any time in the next couple of days."

"All right, I'll let yuh have it, Jim."

They separated and Merrick went to the Pinnacle Saloon, where he met Honey Bee. Honey had drunk enough to make him loquacious.

"Didja accept Joe's resignation?" asked Honey.

"Nothin' else to do," replied Merrick. There was little love lost between these two men.

"Uh-huh." Honey leaned against the bar and cuffed his hat to one side of his head.

"Who'sa sheriff now?"

"Len Kelsey."

"O-o-o-oh, is that so? My, my! Things shore do change quick. If yuh had a lawyer and a doctor in yore Circle M, you'd kinda run the whole danged country, wouldn't yuh?"

"Oh, I don't know," Merrick grinned and invited Honey to have a drink.

"Well, I'll drink with yuh," agreed Honey. "I'm sad at heart." They lifted their glasses to each other.

"Hits Jim Wheeler pretty hard," said Merrick gravely.

"Sure does. Here's how."

"He tells me," said Merrick, placing his glass on the bar, "that his daughter is goin' East with Miss Hatton."

"Yeah, I heard that," said Honey sadly. "I didn't know it was all settled."

"I reckon it is. Anyway, I'm makin' a loan to Jim. He's in kinda heavy at the bank; so I'm lettin' him have the money."

"Uh-huh. Well, that's nice of yuh."

"Where's Joe Rich, Honey?"

"I left him down at his new place, settin' there, lookin' at nothin'. That boy's half crazy."

"Must have been more than half crazy," declared Merrick.

"Yeah. Now I'll buy a drink."

Honey went back to Joe's place before he went to the Lazy B, and found Joe still sitting in the same chair. He told Joe what Merrick had said about Jim's borrowing money from Merrick to send Peggy with Laura.

"How much did he have to borrow?" asked Joe.

Honey didn't know.

"Jim Wheeler must be short of money," said Honey. "Merrick said he was in pretty deep with the Pinnacle bank. They accepted yore resignation and appointed Len Kelsey, Joe."

"Quick work," said Joe shortly.

"Yeah, I'll say it is. You were a fool to quit that job."

Honey left him there and rode out of town. He intended going straight back to the Lazy B, but began thinking about Laura Hatton so strongly that he found himself crossing the Tumbling River bridge before he realized where he was heading.

Jim Wheeler arrived there ahead of Honey, and was sitting on the porch, talking with Peggy and Laura, while Jack Ralston, of the Circle M, sat on a step, hat on the back of his head. Ralston was a tall, curly-headed young man who thought quite a lot of Jack Ralston. He was a clever roper, and one of the best bronc riders in the country.

Honey scowled and wanted to keep right on riding, but he was so close that it might look queer if he didn't stop. Peggy went into the house before Honey arrived. Ralston looked critically at Honey, nodded shortly, and resumed conversation with Laura.

Honey dismounted. Then he uncinched his saddle, shook it a little, and took plenty of time cinching it again. He knew he was of a hair-trigger disposition, and was trying to curb it. Ralston was telling Laura about how he rode Derelict, a locally famous outlaw horse, at a recent rodeo. Honey's ears reddened slightly. Derelict had thrown Honey the day before Ralston had ridden him, and it had taken ten minutes for Honey to recover consciousness.

"It must be wonderful to ride a bucking horse," said Laura. "I saw Lonnie Myers ride one at the Flying H. Oh, it was a lot of fun!"

"That was just an ordinary bucker," said Ralston. "Any puncher can ride a half-broke bucker. Lots of the boys in this country think they're riders, but when it comes to fannin' the real buckers—they don't show much. You wait until we have another rodeo, and I'll show yuh some ridin'."

"Yeah, he's a good rider," said Honey, still fussing with his latigo. "Awful good rider. I shouldn't be surprized if he's half as good as he thinks he is. Ridin' broncs makes folks talk thataway. Of course, us ord'nary punchers don't go lookin' for glory in the bronc corral, so we never do get shook up very bad. But you can tell them good riders every time. They're kinda buck-drunk, as yuh might say. They ain't very tight-brained to begin with, and all that shock and jerk soon gits the inside of their heads kinda rattly.

"Oh, they're all right, as far as that goes. Nobody expects 'em to do anythin' but ride buckers. But they don't know it, and the way them p'fessional bronc riders do talk! Mebbe they ain't so much to blame, at that; but everythin' is 'I' with 'em. Rodeos are all right, I s'pose. Folks get a lot of fun out of it; but them buckin' contests shore do bring in undesirable citizens."

Honey had spoken so earnestly that Laura Hatton did not realize he was talking about Jack Ralston.

But Jack Ralston knew. He got to his feet, glaring at Honey, who paid no attention to him at all. He adjusted the split-ear headstall of his bridle, looked it over critically and came over to the steps. Ralston glanced from Honey to Laura and then shot a glance at Jim Wheeler, who, in spite of the misery in his soul, was trying to stifle a laugh.

"Well, I'll be goin'," said Ralston. "Good day."

Honey twisted his mouth into a wide grin as he watched Ralston ride away.

"He is very entertaining," said Laura.

"Who—Jack?" Honey grinned widely. "Liars mostly always are."

Jim Wheeler laughed and went into the house, for which Honey thanked him mentally. Honey sat down on the steps, cuffed his hat to the back of his head and sighed deeply.

"How's Peggy feelin'?" he asked.

"Better. She's going back home with me; it's all settled."

"Uh-huh," said Honey gloomily. "Lotta luck in that for me."

"For you?"

"Yeah; you goin' away."

"Oh!" Laura's blue eyes opened wide. "Well, you knew I was only here on a visit, Honey."

"Oh! shore; I knowed it. Yuh can't stay, huh?"

"Not very well."

"Uh-huh. I s'pose—" Honey hesitated awkwardly. "I s'pose you've got a lot of fellers back East, eh?"

He pointed north, but the direction made no difference. Laura smiled.

"Fellows? A few—perhaps."

"Uh-huh." Honey scuffed a heel against the step, rattling his spur-chain. "I s'pose you'll be gettin' married, huh?"

"When?"

"Oh, some of these days," gloomily.

Laura shook her pretty head violently.

"You bet I won't! After what happened last night I wouldn't marry the best man on earth."

"I'm shore glad to hear yuh say that," said Honey seriously.

"Why?" demanded Laura quickly.

" 'Cause if yuh marry the man I hope yuh will, yuh shore won't be gettin' the best man in the world."

Laura blushed and got to her feet. Honey got up, too, and they faced each other.

"You ain't sore, are yuh, Laura?" he asked.

She shook her head slowly.

"No, Honey; I can't get mad at you—but I do think you are awfully funny."

She turned and walked into the house. Honey stared at the doorway for several moments before going back to his horse.

"She thinks I'm awfully funny," he told his horse. "I must be—she didn't even crack a smile."

CHAPTER III

THE NEW SHERIFF

THE following morning Joe moved his few effects from the sheriff's office. Kelsey had just appointed Jack Ralston to act as his deputy, and was showing him where everything was in the office. Kelsey was inclined to be a little superior, and did not shake hands with Joe.

"What do yuh figure on doin', Joe?" asked Ralston.

"Haven't figured anythin' yet, Jack. Probably leave in a few days."

Kelsey did not ask any questions, nor did he look up from the desk when Joe went away. Joe took his belongings down to his little cottage, where he selected the few things he would take with him. He would turn the furniture and carpets back to the Pinnacle Merchandise Company and let somebody handle the sale of the house.

Later on he went up the street, intending to see about having the furniture taken back, when he saw Jim Wheeler and Ed Merrick standing in front of the Pinnacle Saloon. It suddenly struck Joe that this would be a good chance to go out to the HJ and see Peggy. He was ashamed even to face her, but he would feel like a dog if he went away from Tumbling River without seeing her again.

He turned and went to his stable, where he saddled his horse and rode away. There were times during his journey out there when he turned back. But he cursed himself for being a coward and went on. He was not going to ask her to forgive him. That idea had never entered his head.

Peggy was alone on the porch, sitting deep in an old rocking-chair, and did not see Joe until he came up the steps. She started to get up, but sank back, staring at him. Then the tears came and she threw one arm across her face.

"Don't cry," begged Joe. "Curse me, Peggy. I can stand it. I came out here to be cursed—and to say good-by. I haven't any excuse that you or anybody else would believe; so I'm not askin' anythin'—not excusin' myself. But I didn't want to go away without seein' yuh again."

"Oh, why did you do it, Joe?" she sobbed. "Why? Why?"

"I dunno, Peggy. It's done. There ain't anythin' I can do to make it any different than it is. What's the use of me sayin' I'm sorry? I've been to hell since that night, and it's a rough road. But I just want yuh to tell me good-by. It ain't much to ask, even after what I've done. Just a good-by. Peggy."

But she did not speak. Joe's face was the color of wood ashes as he turned and went down the steps to his horse. For several moments he leaned against his horse, looking back at her, but she had not moved. She was just a huddled heap in the old chair. The sunlight slanted under a corner of the porch, striking across her hair.

He shut his lips tightly, swung into the saddle and rode slowly away. Peggy stirred. Laura had come to the doorway. She had been inside the living-room, listening.

"Where are you going, Joe?" asked Peggy softly. It was hardly more than a whisper. Laura looked curiously at her, wondering.

"You're not going away—to stay, Joe?" said Peggy.

"He's gone, Peggy," said Laura. "Didn't you know?"

Peggy looked up quickly, blinking the tears from her eyes, staring at Laura.

"Gone?" she asked.

"My dear, he went away after he asked you to tell him good-by," said Laura. "Didn't you know he went away?"

"I didn't know, Laura."

Peggy got to her feet and went to the side porch-railing. Far down the road toward the river bridge was a little cloud of dust which showed the passing of Joe Rich. Peggy turned and looked at Laura, but neither of them spoke. Joe Rich had gone away without even a good-by from the girl who still loved him; so there was nothing left to say.

UNCLE HOZIE WHEELER and Lonnie Myers were heading for the HJ ranch. They had crossed the railroad right-of-way at an old wagon-road crossing and struck the HJ road about half a mile west of the Tumbling River bridge. One of the boys had heard that Peggy was going East, and Aunt Emma rushed Hozie right down there to see whether there was any truth in the report. Uncle Hozie didn't care for the solitary ride; so he took Lonnie along. Lonnie was long, lean, and sad of face, thin-haired and inclined to freckle. He was prone to sing sad songs in a quavering tenor and, besides that certain talent, had a developed sense of humor.

"That's wimmin for yuh, Lonnie," declared Uncle Hozie. "All she had to do was to hear that Peggy figures on goin' away, and she chases us down here. Prob'ly wants to put her up a lunch. Ma's funny thataway. If you've got good sense, you'll stay single, Lonnie. Of course, there ain't liable to nobody pick yuh. You ain't e-legible."

"What's that, Hozie?"

"E-legible? Oh, that's a p'lite word, Lonnie. It means that you wouldn't be worth a lot to anybody. It means that nobody wants to hook a sucker when the bass are bitin'."

"Oh, yeah. Joe Rich was e-legible, wasn't he, Hozie?"

"He was—" said Hozie dryly. "He was a big bass when he was hooked, but a sucker when he was landed."

"Uh-huh. Say, that Hatton girl is shore a dinger. I never did see hair and skin like she's got. I'd be scared to touch her."

"So would I—if Honey Bee was lookin', Lonnie."

"Aw, he jist thinks she's his girl."

"Mebbe. Huh!"

Uncle Hozie lifted in his stirrups and looked down the road.

"What's this we're comin' to, Lonnie?"

It was Joe Rich, dismounted, standing in the middle of the road. Standing against the brush on the river side of the road was Jim Wheeler's horse, and Jim Wheeler was in a huddled heap in the middle of the road.

Uncle Hozie and Lonnie dismounted quickly and went over to him. His right leg was twisted in a peculiar position and his head had been badly beaten. Uncle Hozie dropped to his knees and examined him as quickly as possible.

"Joe, for God's sake, what happened to Jim?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Joe dully. "He—his foot was caught in the stirrup, Hozie. The horse dragged him. I just found him a minute ago. Yuh can see his—his leg's broke."

Joe pointed up the dusty road toward town.

"Yuh can see where the horse dragged him."

The trail through the dust was plainly visible, and the condition of Jim's clothes showed what had happened.

"Still alive," panted Hozie. "Lonnie, ride to town as fast as yuh can. Get a hack and the doctor. We can't move him any other way."

Lonnie ran to his horse, mounted on the run and went racing up the road. It was shady along the road; so they made no effort to move Wheeler. Hozie paced up and down beside the road, his hands clenched.

"Where have you been, Joe?" he asked.

Joe, squatting on his heels beside the road, looked up at the old man.

"I was over at the HJ, Hozie."

"Uh-huh. I wonder if there's anythin' we can do? By golly, I never felt so danged helpless in my life. I tell yuh, Joe, he's awful badly hurt."

"Awful bad, Hozie. I'm afraid he won't live to get to town."

"And we can't do a thing."

"Only wait, Hozie. Old Doc Curzon is pretty good. He'll save Jim if it's possible."

It seemed hours before any one came. Len Kelsey and Jack Ralston were the first to arrive. Kelsey looked at Jim Wheeler, listened to what Hozie had to say and then walked up the road, trying to find the spot where Jim had fallen out of his saddle. Ralston squatted on his heels, smoking a cigaret, but had nothing to say.

Then came the doctor, followed by Lonnie driving a livery team hitched to a spring-wagon. Several cowboys were also among the interested spectators. The old doctor made a quick examination, after which they placed Jim Wheeler in the bottom of the spring-wagon and started back to town.

"How bad is he hurt, Doc?" asked Hozie anxiously.

"Pretty —— bad!" snapped the old doctor. "Leg broke once—mebbe twice. Head battered up. Lucky to be alive. Be lucky to live. Don't ask questions until I know something."

"Hadn't we better take him home?" asked Kelsey.

"Take him to my place," said the doctor.

Joe mounted his horse and rode up beside Hozie.

"Somebody ought to tell Peggy," he said.

Hozie nodded.

"You want to go, Joe?"

"You know I couldn't, Hozie."

"Sure. Lonnie, you go and tell her. Jist tell her—"

"A-a-a-aw, my ——!" snorted Lonnie. "Me? Aw, I'd make a mess of it, Hozie."

"Thasall right, Lonnie; it's a mess already. Go ahead."

Lonnie went, but Lonnie didn't want to; and he didn't mind telling the world that his vocation was punching cows and not being a messenger of bad news.

"Thasall right, Lonnie," assured Hozie. "I won't forget it."

" 'F yuh think I will, yo're crazy," said Lonnie.

Joe and Uncle Hozie rode back to Pinnacle City together. A crowd gathered around the doctor's house, waiting for a report on Jim's condition. But before such a report was forthcoming, Lonnie Myers drove in with Peggy and Laura in a buggy from the HJ ranch.

And when the report did come, it shocked every one. Jim Wheeler had died from concussion of the brain. The crowd moved silently away. Jim Wheeler was one of the old-timers, and his death, as Nebrasky Jones said, was "a ter'ble jolt to mankind of Tumblin' River."

Uncle Hozie took Peggy and Laura out to the Flying H, and Lonnie Myers proceeded to drink more whisky than was good for him, in order to forget.

"I was in there when the doctor told 'em," said Lonnie. "Leave-that-bottle-where-it-is! I'm the only person that knows when I've got enough. Jist like a marble statue, that girl was. Didn't say nothin'; didn't do nothin'. Say! Why don'tcha git some liquor that's got stren'th?"

"I betcha she feels bad, jist the same," said "Slim" Coleman, of the Lazy B. Slim wasn't very bright.

Lonnie looked pityingly at Slim.

"Oh, I s'pose she does, Slim. If I was in yore place, I'd go away before I tromp yuh to death."

"Aw, you ain't goin' to tromp nobody, Lonnie; yo're drunk."

"I ain't, but I will be," solemnly. "And when I do git drunk, I'll prob'ly forget that yo're jist plain ignorant, Slimmie. Now, you better go spin yore rope where I can't see nor hear yuh."

Nebrasky Jones joined Lonnie, and within an hour Dan Leach rode in from the Flying H. Uncle Hozie and the girls had reached the ranch, and Dan said there was too much grief for him; so he came to town.

And thus the Heavenly Triplets got together. Nebrasky and Lonnie were far ahead of Dan, so far as drinks were concerned, and were already given to short crying spells. Lonnie insisted on repeating the story of how they found Joe Rich with Jim Wheeler. According to Lonnie's varying stories, they found Joe and Jim everywhere along the road from the Tumbling River bridge to Pinnacle City.

Time after time he explained how he had broken the bad news to Peggy and Laura. His diplomacy was wonderful to hear, and some of his speeches left him breathless. When as a matter of fact he had said to Peggy:

"Jim's been dragged and they're takin' him to town. Dunno how bad he's hurt, but he shore looks dead to me."

Dan had been with them about an hour when Kelsey came to the Pinnacle bar. Lonnie looked upon him with great disfavor. Joe had been a particular bunkie of the Flying H boys, and they were still loyal. No matter if Joe had resigned voluntarily, they felt that Len Kelsey was to blame.

Len walked back among the tables, where he talked to "Handsome" Harry Clark, who owned the Pinnacle. Harry was not handsome by any known standard of beauty, being a hard-faced, sandy-haired individual, with a crooked nose and one sagging eyebrow, caused by stopping a beer bottle in full flight.

"I don' like 'm," declared Lonnie owlishly. "Heza disgrash to—to anythin' what'ver."

"My sen'ments to a i-ota," said Nebrasky. "But what can yuh do, Lonnie? Yo're speakin' of our sher'f, ain'tcha?"

"O-o-o-oh, u-nan-i-mushly!"

"Don't be foolish," advised Dan, who was half sober yet. "He's the sheriff, no matter if he should have been drowned in infancy."

"H'lo, Misser Cold-Feet," grinned Lonnie. "Dan's slowin' up on us, Nebrasky."

"Pos'tively," nodded Nebrasky. "Old boy's showin' age."

"Aw, yo're crazy," flared Dan. "But what can yuh do?"

"Flip 'm," said Lonnie gleefully.

The gentle art of flipping a man consisted of two men getting one on each side of the one to be flipped, grasping him by arms and legs, and turning him completely over. It is a queer sensation, and harmless, if done right. Kelsey was inches taller than either Nebrasky or Lonnie.

The boys goggled wisely at each other and waited. Kelsey finished his conversation with Clark and came back past the bar.

"That shore was awful bad about Jim Wheeler, wasn't it?" said Dan Leach.

The sheriff stopped beside the bar.

"It shore was," he said emphatically. "That horse must 'a' dragged him quite a ways."

"It was like thish," explained Lonnie thickly.

He moved to the left side of Kelsey, while Nebrasky stepped back, taking his position at Kelsey's right.

"Me and Hozie Wheeler," said Lonnie, "was ridin'—let 'er go, Nebrasky!"

And before the unsuspecting sheriff knew what was happening he had been grasped by arms and legs and was starting to imitate a Ferris wheel.

Exerting all their strength, the two drunken cowboys managed to swing Kelsey up to where his feet were almost pointing at the ceiling—but there they stuck. Their leverage was gone. Kelsey's six-shooter fell from his holster, and his watch fell the full length of the chain, striking Kelsey in the chin.

Overbalanced, the two cowboys started staggering backward, stumbled into a card-table and went down with a crash, letting the struggling Kelsey drop squarely on the top of his head.

The crash was terrific. Nebrasky went backward, almost to the wall, working his feet frantically to try to catch up with his body, but went flat on his back. Lonnie caromed off the card-table and landed on his hands and knees, yelling for everybody to get out of his way.

But Kelsey suffered most. He had fallen about three feet on the top of his head, and was still seeing stars. Leach, being of a thoughtful turn of mind, kicked Kelsey's six-shooter down toward the middle of the room, where it came to rest under a card-table.

Several of the saloon employees, including Clark, the owner, came to Kelsey's assistance and sat him in a chair, where he caressed his head and made funny noises.

"You boys better go before he wakes up," advised Clark.

"Is that sho?" asked Lonnie thickly. "Shince when did the Flyin' H outfit learn t' run, I'd crave to know?"

"Tha's my cravin', likewise," said Nebrasky, trying to put his hat on upside down. "Whazze-e got any right to git mad 'bout, in the firs' place? Goo'ness, it was all in fun."

Kelsey was rapidly recovering, and he knew what had happened. His right hand felt his empty holster, and his eyes searched the floor. He had heard the gun fall when he was upside down.

"It's under that card-table up there," said Clark.

Kelsey saw it. He got up slowly and went toward his gun, while the Heavenly Triplets walked straight out through the front doorway. Possibly they did not go straight, but they were out of the saloon when Kelsey recovered his gun.

"I wouldn't do anything, if I was you, Len," said Clark. "They were all drunk and didn't realize."

"Didn't they?" cried Len flatly. "Don't never think they didn't. It was all framed up to dump me on my head. I know that gang."

"Better have a drink and forget it, Len."

"Yeah, that's fine—for you. By ——, you never got a bump like that—and forgot it."

Kelsey walked straight to the street, but there was no sign of the three men from the Flying H. Kelsey lingered for several moments, then went on toward his office, while into the back door of the Pinnacle Saloon came Nebrasky, Lonnie and Dan, as if nothing had happened.

"Kelsey is lookin' for you three," said Clark.

"Kelsey?" Lonnie blinked seriously.

"Kelsey? Oh, the sheriff? Lookin' for us?"

"Whazze want?" asked Nebrasky.

"You better wait and see, Nebrasky."

"Now that's what I call shound advice, Harry."

"I betcha I know what he wants," said Lonnie. "He wants us to turn him the rest of the way over. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

This guess seemed so good to them that they sagged against the bar and whooped merrily.

Joe Rich, following the announcement of Jim Wheeler's death, took his horse back to the stable and then went to the store where he had purchased his house furnishings and told the storekeeper to take them back, as there was little chance of their ever being paid for.

When Joe came out he met Angus McLaren, the big grave-faced Scotsman.

"Isn't it too bad about poor Jim Wheeler!" exclaimed Angus. "I just heard of it, Joe."

Joe nodded. His nose and lips were still sore from the weight of Jim Wheeler's fist, and his right hand went involuntarily to his sore spots. McLaren noticed this.

"Ye shouldn't bear any grudge now, Joe," he said softly.

"Grudge?"

"Over what he did to ye, Joe."

Joe shook his head.

"I suppose he had plenty of cause, Mac."

"No matter; he's dead now. They say ye found him."

"Yeah, I did, Mac. I was on my way back from the HJ."

"He wasn't dead then?"

"No, not then. Hozie and Lonnie came along in a few minutes. He was alive then, but I think he died on the way in."

While they were talking Len Kelsey came from the Pinnacle Saloon, rubbing his head, and went down to his office.

"Ye knew we appointed Len in your place, Joe?" asked McLaren.

"I hear yuh did, Mac. And Len appointed Ralston, eh?"

"That's it. What do ye aim to do now?"

"I think I'll leave here, Mac. There's nothin' in Tumblin' River for me any more."

"Ye might get on with the Circle M. Merrick will be short one man, now that Ralston is an officer."

"No, Mac; I don't think I'll stay."

"Mm-m-m-m," McLaren considered Joe gravely.

"Joe, I'd have banked on ye. There's a lot more folks in this country that would have bet a million to one that ye wouldn't do a thing like ye done. Why did ye do it?"

Joe shook his head slowly.

"Mac, there's things that I don't even know; so I can't tell yuh anythin'."

"Well, ye were drunk, weren't ye?"

"Ask Honey Bee, Ed Merrick, Ben Collins or Limpy Nelson. They all saw me, Mac. That should be evidence enough."

"Ay," McLaren sighed. "There seems to be plenty of evidence that you played the fool. I dunno." McLaren took a deep breath and expelled it forcibly. "Well, I wish ye all the luck in the world, Joe Rich. I think you are payin' for yer own sins; but ye are a young man and the world is wide."

They shook hands gravely and Joe went back to his little cottage. It seemed queer that he should be leaving Pinnacle City; almost as queer as the fact that Jim Wheeler was lying dead at the doctor's office. Joe didn't know where he was going, except that it would be out through the south end of the valley; possibly down into Arizona. He would travel light. His war-bag contained a change of clothes, and that was all, except for a few trinkets.

He tied it to his saddle, covering it with a black slicker, and rode up to the county treasurer's office, where he drew a warrant for his remaining salary. Then he cashed it at the Pinnacle City bank, and drew out the few remaining dollars he had on deposit there.

As he came from the bank he met Ed Merrick, who had just tied his horse farther up the street.

"Hello, Joe," greeted Merrick. "What's all this talk about Jim Wheeler gettin' killed?"

"I reckon you heard right, Ed," said Joe.

"Horse drug him to death?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I'll be ——!"

Merrick went on down the street, and Joe noticed that he walked fast, as if he was in a big hurry. Joe heard some one call his name, and he turned to see the Heavenly Triplets coming across the street toward him from the Pinnacle Saloon. They were all very unsteady, but also very earnest.

Lonnie sagged back on his heels and considered the roll behind the cantle of Joe's saddle. He sagged ahead and drew the slicker aside enough to disclose the war-bag.

"Where you goin', Joe?" he demanded. "All packed up, eh?"

"I'm pullin' out, Lonnie," said Joe gravely. "I'm shore glad I had a chance to say good-by to you boys."

"Na-a-awshir," Nebrasky spoke with great deliberation. "Nobody c'n go way like thish, Joseph. Nawshir. Gotta have big party. Misser Rich," gravely, "meet Misser Jones and Misser Leach."

Dan and Nebrasky shook hands seriously with Joe.

"Pleased t' meetcha," said Nebrasky. "I used to know a sher'f that looked like you, par'ner. Oh, ver' mush like you! I slep' in the same bunk with him for two years. You jus' passin' through our fair city, Misser Rich?"

"Just passin' through," said Joe slowly. He saw Merrick and Kelsey leaving the sheriff's office.

"Here comes Misser Kelsey," grinned Lonnie. "'F he gits close enough we'll complete the swing on him, Nebrasky."

"He won't never git close enough," chuckled Dan. "That bird ain't never goin' t' light close to any of us."

Joe held out his hand to Lonnie, who gripped it quickly.

"So-long, Lonnie," said Joe. "Be good to yourself."

"Aw-right, Joe."

Joe shook hands with Dan and Nebrasky, who did it in a dumb sort of a way. Perhaps they did not understand that Joe was leaving Tumbling River. Joe turned to his horse and started to mount. Merrick and Kelsey were close now, and Kelsey said to Joe—

"You ain't leavin' us, are yuh, Joe?"

Joe nodded.

"Yeah, I'm goin', Len."

"Uh-huh. Mebbe yuh better wait a little while, Joe. Somethin' has come up just lately. Better tie yore horse and wait till we get this ironed out."

"What do yuh mean, Len?"

"Has Hozie gone home?" Len spoke to Lonnie.

"Gone home? Of course he's gone home. You seen him leave, didn't yuh?"

Kelsey nodded. Lonnie seemed belligerent.

"When yuh found Jim Wheeler, yuh—uh—didn't look in his pockets, didja, Lonnie?"

"Look in his pockets? What for, I'd crave to ask yuh?"

Kelsey turned to Merrick.

"Mebbe you better go down to the doctor's place, Ed. Mebbe it's still there. I don't reckon anybody looked."

Merrick nodded shortly and hurried away. Joe looked curiously at Kelsey, but the new sheriff was leaning against a porch post, rolling a cigaret.

"Just why had I ought to wait?" asked Joe.

"Just for instance," Kelsey lighted his cigaret.

"That's the new sheriff," said Lonnie. "Cool and collected, always gets his man. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Kelsey winced. Nebrasky looked him over thoroughly.

"That's him," declared Nebrasky. "Yuh gotta look close at him to tell. Kelsey is his name. Belonged to the Circle M before the county bought him."

"You think yo're pretty —— smart, don't cha?" flared Kelsey.

"Don't 'tagonize him," begged Dan.

Joe stepped from his horse and faced Kelsey.

"What's the idea of askin' me to wait, Len?"

"Can't tell yuh yet, Joe."

"Suppose I decided to go ahead?"

"No, I don't think yuh will."

"I'm not under arrest, am I?"

"Not yet."

"Not yet, eh?" Joe laughed recklessly. "Well, I reckon I'll be goin' then."

Joe turned back to his horse.

"Yo're not goin'!" snapped Kelsey.

Joe whirled quickly. Kelsey had half-drawn his gun. It was a foolish move on Kelsey's part; he should have covered Joe, if he wanted to hold him badly enough to resort to a gun-play. Joe did not hesitate. His right hand jerked upward and he fired from his waist.

Kelsey's gun was out of the holster, but his hand flipped open and the gun fell to the sidewalk. He staggered backward, clutching his right forearm, while Joe swung into his saddle and rode swiftly out of town, heading south.

The revolver shot attracted plenty of attention, and it also served to sober the

Heavenly Triplets. Kelsey swore bitterly as he clawed away his shirt sleeve. The heavy bullet had plowed its way through the muscles of his forearm, but did not touch the bone. The shock of it had caused Kelsey's hand to jerk open, releasing his gun.

Folks were crowding in from every direction, trying to find out what it was all about.

"You better pack that arm to the doctor," advised Lonnie.

Kelsey nodded and bit off more profanity. Ed Merrick came through the crowd and quickly got the story of what had happened.

"Go and get it dressed, Kelsey," he said, after examining the wound. "No bones broke. Is Jack at the office?"

"Here," said Ralston, shoving his way through.

"Better get on Joe's trail, Jack," said Merrick quickly. "He—you don't need a warrant. Bring him back!"

Ralston ran down the street, while the crowd demanded that Merrick tell them what it was all about. But Merrick merely shut his lips and went to the court-house, followed by Angus McLaren, who was as much at sea as any of the crowd.

Once inside their office McLaren asked Merrick what the trouble was all about.

"I'm not accusin' Joe Rich," said Merrick. "But he was the one who found Jim Wheeler. Today I drew five thousand from the Pinnacle bank and loaned it to Jim Wheeler on his note. He had that money on him when he left town. There is no money in his pockets now, and no one has found any money on him since he came back, or during the time of the first examination. The money is gone, Mac."

"And Joe was the first man to find him," muttered McLaren. "Five thousand dollars! Merrick, that's enough to tempt a man."

"Yo're —— right it is! And Joe shot Kelsey in the arm."

"Kelsey was drawin'," reminded McLaren. "The boys say that Kelsey reached for his gun first. Joe wasn't under arrest."

"No, that's true, Mac. But if Joe wasn't guilty, why didn't he stay until it could be cleared up? Ah! there's Ralston!"

Through the window they saw the deputy ride up in front of the court-house, where he talked with several men. Merrick and McLaren went out to him. It seemed as if all the cowboys had disappeared. Ralston spurred over in front of the Pinnacle and went into the saloon, but came out again.

McLaren smothered a grin. The cowboys knew that Ralston would deputize them to ride with him, and they would be obliged to obey his orders; but if he couldn't find them—that was a different matter.

"By ——, they all ducked!" snorted Ralston angrily.

"Looks like it," agreed Merrick. "Well, I'll go with yuh, Jack. If we can't do any better, we might find some of the boys at my ranch. By ——, they won't sneak out on yuh!"

Merrick crossed the street to the Pinnacle hitch-rack and mounted his horse. Ralston went back to the office and got an extra Winchester for Merrick, and they rode away at a swift gallop.

They had barely disappeared when the Heavenly Triplets showed up. They had rolled under the sidewalk near where Joe had shot Kelsey. From the depths of an empty wagon-box farther up the street came Abe Liston, of the 3W3. Slim Coleman, of the Lazy B, sauntered out of the narrow alley between the Pinnacle Saloon and a feed-store.

The Heavenly Triplets were fairly sober now—too sober to think of anything funny to do; so they headed for the Pinnacle Saloon.

"Hey, you snake-hunters!" yelled Slim Coleman. "Didn't yuh ride away with the posse?"

"We shore did!" replied Lonnie. "Couldn't find a thing. C'mon and have a drink, you man-hunter."

"Sheriffin' does make a feller kinda dry," admitted Slim. "I'll go yuh once, if I lose all m'hair. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! I'll betcha Ralston is mad enough to gnaw a nail."

"Well, he can go plumb to ——, as far as we're concerned," declared Nebrasky. "Any old time we go huntin' criminals, it'll be when there ain't nothin' else to do. Anyway, I don't look upon the shootin' of Kelsey as a crime."

They lined up at the bar and offered to sing a song for the drinks. But the bartender was a bit skeptical about the intrinsic value of anything they might sing.

"It's all right with me, yuh understand," explained the bartender. "But when

Handsome starts checkin' up the till at night—you know what I mean."

"Oh, shore," nodded Lonnie. "Some folks never appreciate talent. Howja like to have a free song?"

"Oh, I can absorb anythin' that don't hurt the rest of yuh. All I ask is that yuh don't require my opinion. I'm honest."

Angus McLaren came in and Lonnie invited him to share their hospitality. McLaren rarely drank anything, but no one had ever known him to refuse an invitation.

"We just got back from ridin' with the deputy," explained Nebrasky. "Ridin' allus makes me dry."

McLaren laughed and poured out a drink.

"Well, here's hopin' they never even catch sight of Joe's dust," said Leach.

"I dunno," said McLaren. "Ye see, boys, it's a serious charge they've put against Joe Rich."

"Serious!" snorted Lonnie. "To shoot Kelsey? Why, Kelsey was reachin' for—"

"I know that, Lonnie. But that's not the charge. Today Ed Merrick loaned Jim Wheeler five thousand in cash and took Jim's note for it. Jim rode away with the money. There's not a cent on poor Jim—and Joe was the one who found him."

"A-a-a-a-aw, ——!" Lonnie dropped his glass on the floor.

"Yuh mean to say that Joe got away with it?" asked Nebrasky.

"I'm not sayin' anythin', Nebr-r-rasky. It was told to me. I went to the bank, and they tell me Merrick drew the money."

"Well, for ——'s sake!" snorted Lonnie. "That's awful!"

"Aye, it is. Well, here's luck, boys!"

McLaren drained his glass alone. The Heavenly Triplets and Slim had no taste for liquor now. They went outside and sat down on the edge of the sidewalk, humped over like four crows on a fence-rail.

For possibly five minutes they said nothing. Then Lonnie broke the silence with—

"Joe's turnin' out to be a humdinger."

Nebrasky spat dryly and expounded—

"Yuh never can tell which way a dill-pickle will squirt."

"Five 'r no five—I hope he gits away," said Leach.

"I thought there was somethin' funny about him bein' in such a hurry to git away," said Slim.

"And you know yo're a —— liar, Slim," said Lonnie.

"Yeah, I know it," agreed Slim.

"Might as well go home, I s'pose," observed Nebrasky.

"Yeah, and right here and now I want to proclaim," said Lonnie, "there ain't goin' to be no drawin' straws and all that kinda stuff; *sabe?* I don't care a —— which one of you two pelicans decide to break the news at the Flyin' H, but I want yuh to know it ain't goin' to be little Lonnie. By ——, I've broke all the news I'm goin' to today!"

"I guess we better not say anythin' to 'em a-tall," decided Nebrasky. "It ain't no settled fact."

"Shore—jist let it kinda drift," agreed Leach.

"There goes Kelsey, wearin' his arm in a sling," said Slim. "He's lucky it ain't his head."

"Come dang near bein'," laughed Lonnie, and he headed for the hitch-rack.

Kelsey swore inwardly at the three punchers and wondered why Ralston didn't deputize some of them to go with him. He met Handsome Clark at the door of a Chinese restaurant, and Clark told him that the cowboys had all disappeared when Jack Ralston showed up, and that Merrick had been the only one to ride with him.

Clark did not know about the missing money until Kelsey told him about it.

"No wonder he plugged you," said Clark. "He probably had all that money on him."

"Probably. It was all in currency—big bills, mostly."

"How's the arm?"

"Don't hurt much. Won't be usin' it for a while. I never looked for Joe to shoot. He's awful fast with a gun."

Clark nodded.

"You drew first, didn't you, Len?"

"Mebbe I did. He said he was goin'. Yuh see, I didn't want to arrest him. There wasn't any sure thing that the money wasn't in Wheeler's pockets. I just asked Joe to wait, and when he insisted on goin' I didn't know just what to do. If I'd had any sense, I'd have poked a gun in his ribs and made him wait. Live and learn, I reckon."

"I suppose they'll get him."

"Mebbe. Joe knows this country and he must 'a' been set for a getaway. Yuh can't tell which way he'll go. Headed out south, but he's just as liable to be ridin' north now. He's no fool. And two men might not be able to find him. We can't expect much help from the punchers."

"No, it seems that you can't, Len. Being a sheriff in Tumbling River has its drawbacks."

Len left McLaren and went to the depot, where he sent wires to Kelo and Ransome, notifying the marshals of each place to watch for Joe Rich. And then he went back to his office to nurse his aching arm and swear at himself for half-drawing a six-shooter on a man like Joe Rich.

CHAPTER IV

RANGE FUNERAL

BAD news travels swiftly in the range country, and the following morning there was quite a gathering of the clan at the Flying H. People came to extend their sympathy to Peggy Wheeler and to the rest of the Wheeler family. Even the Reverend Henry Lake and his slow-moving old buggy horse showed up at the ranch, the minister dressed in his ancient best.

Aunt Emma Wheeler, Aunt Annie Bellew, Grandma Owens and Mrs. Buck West gathered together and talked in whispers of the white-faced girl upstairs who did not want to talk with anybody, while the men stood around at the rear of the house in the shade of the big cottonwood and drank up the rest of Uncle Hozie's wedding liquor.

Honey Bee was there, longing for a chance to talk with Laura Hatton. A little later on Len Kelsey, his arm in a sling, rode out. The Heavenly Triplets were sober, but that did not prevent them from making a few caustic remarks about the sheriff when they saw him coming.

"You let him alone," ordered Uncle Hozie. "My ——, ain't there trouble enough, without you startin' a debate with the law? Lonnie, you haul in yore horns; *sabe?*"

"Aw, he gives me a itch," growled Lonnie.

"Go scratch yourself," advised Uncle Hozie.

Kelsey brought no news of Joe Rich. He said that Ralston and Merrick had ridden through to Kelo, but found no trace of the fugitive. Ralston had come back to Pinnacle City at midnight.

"Yuh didn't expect to catch him, didja?" asked Nebrasky.

"Sure we'll get him," confidently. "May take a little while."

"Aw, ——!" snorted Lonnie. "You and Jack Ralston couldn't foller a load of hay through a fresh snow."

"Lonnie, I told yuh—" began Uncle Hozie.

"Yeah, I heard yuh," interrupted Lonnie. "I'm not ridin' him."

Len smiled thinly.

"Thasall right, Hozie. You folks have kinda got the wrong idea of all this. I'm not an enemy of Joe Rich. My ——, I worked with him, didn't I? In my business yuh don't have to hate a man to arrest him. There ain't nothin' personal about me huntin' for Joe. If he's innocent, he ought to stay and prove it. Yuh can't jist sneeze a couple of times and forget that five thousand dollars are missin', can yuh?"

"No, yuh shore can't, Len," agreed Uncle Hozie.

Len didn't stay long. His speech impressed all, except the three Flying H cowpunchers. They had no real reason for disliking Len Kelsey, except that he represented the law, and that he had succeeded Joe Rich. And they were loyal to Joe, even if he was guilty as charged. Theirs was not a fickle friendship; not something that merely endured in fair weather.

Uncle Hozie talked long and earnestly with the minister over the funeral arrangements, and together they went up the stairs to talk with Peggy. Laura left them and came down to the veranda, where Honey Bee beamed with delight.

"I was scared I wasn't goin' to see yuh," he said softly. "How's Peggy standin' it?"

Laura sighed and shook her pretty head.

"Peggy would be all right, if all those women wouldn't sit around and talk about corpses they have seen. They all talk about successful funerals! As though any funeral could be a success! And they all gabble about Joe Rich. Honey, I actually think that some of them believe Joe Rich killed Uncle Jim."

"Eh?" Honey jerked back, staring at her. "Ex-cuse my language, but that's a —— of an idea! Who started that?"

"Oh, I don't know. They talked about Uncle Jim being a good rider and a sober

man and that the saddle did not turn. And he had all that money with him."

"Well, I'll be darned!" snorted Honey. "Did Peggy know Jim Wheeler was borrowin' that money from Merrick?"

"Yes. She didn't know how much. Now she says she can't go. They talk about Uncle Jim having a big mortgage at the bank, and with this five thousand from Merrick—"

"Lotta money," mused Honey Bee. "Huh-how soon do yuh aim to leave, Laura?"

"I don't know. Not until after things are straightened up for Peggy. I sent Dad a wire, telling him that our plans had been changed."

"Then yuh won't be goin' for a while, eh?" Honey sighed with relief. "That's shore fine. Yuh won't go back to the HJ, will yuh?"

"I think so. Wong Lee is still there and Uncle Hozie said one of his boys could go down there and help run the place."

"Yea-a-a-ah? Uh-huh. Which one, I wonder?"

"I don't know. Uncle Hozie spoke about Lonnie Myers."

"Oh, yeah—Lonnie. Ain't settled yet, eh?"

"No; he just spoke about it a while ago."

Uncle Hozie and the minister came out, talking softly; so Laura hurried back upstairs to Peggy. Honey rubbed his chin thoughtfully and waited for Uncle Hozie and the minister to end their conversation.

And then Honey lost no time in backing Uncle Hozie against the wall.

"Laura tells me that Peggy is goin' back to the HJ, after the funeral, Hozie."

Uncle Hozie nodded slowly.

"She says she is, Honey."

"Yo're a pretty good friend of mine, aint'cha, Hozie?"

"Well—" Hozie pursed his lips and blinked at Honey—"I never throwed any rocks at yuh when yuh wasn't lookin'."

Honey leaned forward and whispered rapidly in Hozie's ear.

"Huh? O-o-oh!" Hozie understood.

A few minutes later Hozie met Curt Bellew near the kitchen door.

"I jist wanted to ask yuh somethin', Curt," said Uncle Hozie. "I—uh—I been talkin' to Peggy. Yuh see, Curt, she's goin' to stay at the HJ, at least a while. Won't be nobody there but her and Laura and Wong Lee."

"Uh-huh."

"Well, I been talkin' to her, yuh understand, Curt. She's goin' to need one man to help run things. I—uh—she said she'd like to have Honey Bee to run the place."

"Oh, yea-a-a-ah!"

Curt lifted his eyebrows thoughtfully and hooked his thumbs over his cartridge-belt. He nodded slowly.

"Well, mebbe I can git along without that boy for a while, Hozie. He prob'ly won't want to do it. Honey's funny that-away. But you tell him I said he had to do it. If he kicks about makin' the change—you tell him to come to me."

"Yeah, I'll do that, Curt," solemnly.

They looked at each other seriously for several moments.

"And that ain't the funniest part of it," said Uncle Hozie. "Laura told Honey that I was goin' to loan 'em Lonnie Myers to run the HJ—and there ain't never been any mention of me loanin' anybody."

"She made it all up, Hozie?"

" 'Course she did. Her father's a broker in Philadelphia, and I s'pose Laura inherited her ability to tell p'lite lies from him. But it's all right, ain't it, Curt?"

"Fine! Ma will be glad. She has to watch Honey like a hawk to keep him from cuttin' L.H. on all the furniture."

They chuckled together for several moments. Then—

"Hozie, what's this talk about mebbe Jim's death wasn't an accident?"

"Wimmin," said Hozie quickly. "Old wimmin talkin'."

"Uh-huh. Yeah, I s'pose it is. I don't like it, Hozie. But a while ago I got to thinkin' about Jim. Where's that note? Ed Merrick must 'a' signed a copy for Jim. Merrick's got his copy, signed by Jim."

"Whoever got the money must 'a' took the note, Curt."

"I s'pose. The money was all in big bills. By golly, I hope they find Joe Rich."

Uncle Hozie sighed deeply. He loved Joe Rich like a son, and it was difficult for him to believe Joe guilty.

"It hurts Peggy," he said slowly. "It hurts her as much as the death of her father. Yuh see, she loved Joe a lot."

"I reckon we all did, Hozie—up to the day he was to be married."

"Joe Rich of yesterday," muttered Uncle Hozie.

"Whatcha say, Hozie?"

"Jist thinkin' out loud, Curt. I'll find Honey, and break the bad news to him."

"Yeah; he'll prob'ly be sore as ——."

CHAPTER V

HASHKNIFE AND SLEEPY

IT WAS several days after the funeral of Jim Wheeler, and things in the Tumbling River range seemed back on an even keel again. Joe Rich was still at large. The sheriff had broadcast Joe's description, and the county had offered a thousand dollars reward.

Kelsey and Ralston still searched the Tumbling River hills, hoping that Joe had not left the valley. Even the Heavenly Triplets were too busy to annoy the sheriff, but were looking forward to payday.

Honey Bee was firmly established at the HJ, much to the amusement of every one. Uncle Hozie had never told him that Laura had fibbed about Lonnie Myers' going to run the ranch; so Honey believed Hozie had done him a great favor.

Peggy took little interest in anything. The shock had taken the spirit all out of her, and she realized that it would only be a question of time until the Pinnacle bank and Ed Merrick would own the HJ. Twelve thousand is a lot of money.

Aunt Emma did not like the arrangement at the HJ.

"Them two girls livin' alone with one man."

"Nothin' of the kind," denied Uncle Hozie. "Honey's in love, and a man in love ain't more'n half a man. Anyway, there's Wong Lee."

"A heathen Chinee!"

"He's a Chinaman, but I'll betcha he's as much of a Christian as any of us."

"Anyway," declared Aunt Emma, "I'm goin' to spend all the time I can with the girls."

Aunt Emma was one of those who believed that Jim Wheeler had not died from an accident. She talked with the old doctor about the bruises on Wheeler's skull, and he told her that they were caused by Jim Wheeler's head striking the rocks.

"But how did he fall off?" queried the old lady. "Jim was a good rider, Doc. The saddle never turned with him."

The doctor shook his head.

"I'm sure I don't know, Mrs. Wheeler. I am not a detective. His leg was broken from being hung in the stirrup, I suppose."

"He wasn't hung to the stirrup when Joe found him."

"Wasn't he? Perhaps Joe Rich knows more about it than we do, Mrs. Wheeler."

"Sure—but where's Joe?"

"If I knew I'd be a thousand dollars better off than I am."

But few, if any, of the men thought that it had been anything but an accident. A sudden dizziness, perhaps caused by indigestion, might have made him fall. And the horse, even if it was well broken, might have got frightened and dragged him. But there was no question about his being robbed.

It was the evening of the fifth day since Joe Rich had left Pinnacle City when a long train of dusty cattle-cars drew into the town of Kelo. Dusty, wild-eyed animals peered out through the barred sides of the cars, bawling their displeasure.

The wind was blowing a gale, and to the north an electric storm was coming down the valley. But there was no rain; only wind and a depressed atmosphere which presaged the coming storm. The engine clanked in past the depot and stopped with a jerk that shortened every draw-bar in the long line of cars.

In the caboose of the cattle-train sat a cowboy, humped over on a bench, holding his face in his hands. His broad shoulders twisted painfully and he gave vent to a withering curse when the caboose almost jerked him off the bench.

On the opposite side of the car sat a tall, lean-faced cowboy, his sad gray eyes contemplating the sufferer, who lifted his head, disclosing a swollen jaw. Two other cowboys were seated on the floor of the car, resting their backs against the side-seats, while they industriously shot craps for dimes.

"Hurt yuh pretty bad, Sleepy?" asked the tall cowboy.

The sufferer lifted his head, nodded slowly and inserted a big forefinger inside his mouth.

"Wursh a glew har glog daged dantist libed."

He removed the finger, spat painfully and took his face in both hands again.

"Sleepy" Stevens was suffering the pangs of an aching molar. "Hashknife" Hartley, the tall, lean cowboy, nodded understandingly.

"It's worse than I thought, Sleepy," he said, his voice full of sympathy. "You've got what they call a Eskimo abscess."

"Huh? How do yuh know?"

"I can tell by yore talk—pure Eskimo."

"A-a-a-aw, ——! If you had this—— tooth—"

"We're goin' to water these animals at Pinnacle City," offered one of the crap-shooters. "You'll have time to have that tooth pulled."

"Hadn't ought to be far now," observed Hashknife.

He bent his long nose against the dirty window glass and peered out. The wind whistled past, and the sand sifted through the window. A lightning flash illuminated things and a rumble of thunder came to their ears.

A few minutes later a brakeman, carrying a lighted lantern, swung aboard.

"Wires down," he said shortly.

"What'll that do to us?" queried Hashknife.

"Not much. We're late and we ought to lay out here and let Number 4 pass us, goin' north; but we can't get any orders, and the sidin' is blocked with a freight that broke an axle. We'll go on to Pinnacle City, and the passenger will have to foller us on a slow order."

"Quite a storm, eh?" remarked a crap-shooter.

"—— of a storm ahead of us," declared the brakeman, going out again.

Finally the engine sent out its shrill blasts, calling in the flagman, and in a few moments the draw-bars jerked shudderingly. The cattle-train was on its way again, picking up the conductor at the station.

Sleepy groaned and hunched down in his chair. The tooth had been thumping for eight hours. And there was a question in Sleepy's mind about finding a dentist in Pinnacle City. Few of the old cow-towns boasted a dentist, and the local doctor was usually more or less of a failure with forceps.

The long cattle train moved slowly. There was considerable of a grade between Kelo and Pinnacle City, and the terrific head wind held them back. The conductor and brakeman got into the crap game, trying to kill time over the dreary eighteen-mile stretch.

The train rumbled and clanked along, unable to make much headway.

"Likely blow all the hair off them cow critters," observed one of the cowboys.

The caboose was foggy with dust, and the oil lamps hardly made light enough for them to see the spots on the worn dice.

Suddenly the draw-bars clanked together and the caboose began stopping by jerks. Sleepy swore painfully, when it jerked him upright. The engine whistled shrilly, and the train ground to a stop. The conductor peered out, swore softly and picked up his lantern.

"Must be just about to the Tumbling River bridge," he said.

"How far is it from town?" asked Sleepy.

"Couple of miles," said the brakeman.

He too had picked up his lantern, and they went outside. A moment later the brakeman sprang back onto the steps.

"Bridge on fire," he said. "Lightnin' must have struck it."

He lifted the top off a seat and took out several fuses which he tucked under his arm, picked up a red lantern and hurried out to flag down the track. Hashknife put on his sombrero and climbed off the caboose. It was a long way to the front end of the train, and the wind threatened to blow him off the side of the fill at any time.

The Tumbling River bridge was about a hundred and fifty feet across, built high above the stream. It was mostly of timber construction and one span of it was burning merrily.

Hashknife found the conductor and engineer looking over, both decided that it would be folly to try to run it. It had evidently been burning for quite a while.

"That shore hangs us high and dry, don't it?" asked Hashknife.

The conductor nodded grimly.

"We're here for a while," he said. "Can't take a chance on that thing, and we've got a passenger coming in behind us. They'll be running slow, and won't be hard to flag. The best thing for you boys to do is to go to bed. That span is sure to burn out in this wind."

The wind was so strong that they had to yell in order to converse.

"Might as well be comfortable!" yelled the engineer.

The conductor nodded and followed

Hashknife back to the caboose, where he broke the news to the rest of the boys.

"Ain't that ——?" wailed Sleepy. "Two miles from a dentist, and the road on fire!"

"Better go to bed, Sleepy," said Hashknife. "Mebbe yuh can sleep it off."

But Sleepy told them in no uncertain terms that sleep was out of the question. One of the cowboys produced a pint of liquor, and this served to put Sleepy in better spirits. No one denied him any of it. Hashknife was curious about the passenger train which was following them, and went on to the rear platform.

Possibly they had been stopped for thirty minutes when Hashknife saw the beams of the passenger engine. The road was fairly crooked for several miles, and he could see the beams of the headlight, as it swung around the curves, throwing streamers of light off across the hills. It was not traveling fast. It came closer and closer, and Hashknife wondered why it did not seem to pay any attention to the rear flagman. Of course he was out of sight around a curve, but the speed of the passenger had not diminished.

It swung to the straight track, the beams of the headlight illuminating the rear of the stalled train. It was then that the whistle shrieked and the train quickly ground to a stop about a hundred yards short of the caboose.

A man dropped from the engine and came up to the caboose. It was a uniformed brakeman.

"What's that ahead—a fire?" he asked, swinging up on the steps.

"Bridge on fire," said Hashknife. "Looks like we're here for a while."

"Pshaw! Some wind, eh? Say, I wonder why nobody was flaggin' the rear of this train?"

"They did," declared Hashknife. "I saw the brakeman start back with his fuses and lantern."

"You did? That's funny, we never seen him."

The conductor came out and corroborated Hashknife. In a few minutes the conductor of the passenger came along. He was a fussy little fat man, very important. He wheezed his profanity.

"Can't get across, eh? ——! Wires down behind us. Nothing to do but wait. How did it happen you didn't send out a flag? We might have rammed you."

"Flag went out!" snapped the freight conductor.

"We didn't see it," said the brakeman. "I was in the cab."

"Anyway, he went back," declared the freight conductor. "It's no fault of mine if you fellows can't see."

"Any chance of putting the fire out?" asked the passenger conductor.

"Not a chance. One whole span on fire and this wind is like a blow-torch. Looks like a complete tie-up for this division. There's a section crew at Pinnacle City, but this will be a job for bridge builders."

Hashknife went back in the caboose where Sleepy was lying on a seat, still caressing a sore jaw.

"Stuck completely," said Hashknife. "No dentist for you tonight, cowboy."

The brakeman came in to light a cigaret, and Hashknife questioned him about Pinnacle City.

"South of here is the wagon bridge," said the brakeman. "I ain't familiar with this country, so I can't tell yuh how far it is, but it can't be a mile—not over that, anyway."

He went out, and Hashknife turned to Sleepy.

"How about yuh, cowboy? It ain't over three miles to town. Suppose we walk over and find a dentist?"

"——, I'd do anythin' to stop this ache, Hashknife!"

"All right."

Hashknife went down the car, where he picked up their war-bags and brought them back.

"You ain't pullin' out for keeps, are yuh?" asked one of the crap-shooting cowboys.

"Nope," grinned Hashknife. "We'll meet yuh in Pinnacle City. Only a fool walks away and leaves his war-bag. Yuh never know what's ahead of yuh."

He dug down in his bag and drew out a well-worn cartridge belt to which was attached a scarred holster containing a heavy Colt revolver. He looped the belt around his lean hips, yanked the buckle together and proceeded to fill the cylinder with .45 cartridges.

Sleepy released his jaw long enough to buckle on his own armament, and swung the bag over his shoulder and they went out into the night. The train crew had left the caboose steps as the two cowboys swung down off the fill and stumbled their way to

the barb-wire fence of the right-of-way.

"Blacker 'n the inside of a cat," declared Sleepy, after they were away from the lights of the train. "Look out yuh don't fall off the river bank."

"It shore is kinda vague," said Hashknife. "Jist take it easy."

"Ain't nobody breakin' into a gallop," retorted Sleepy.

They were traveling through a thicket of jack-pines, which whipped them across the face and tangled their feet. The wind was still blowing furiously, and there was a spit of rain in the air.

Hashknife was surging ahead, one hand flung up to protect his face from the whipping branches, when he almost ran into some object. It flashed into his mind that it was a range animal, perhaps a horse. Sleepy bumped into Hashknife and stopped with a grunt.

Then came the flash of a gun, a streak of flame that licked out into the wind not over fifteen feet from them. The wind seemed fairly to blow the report away from them. It was little more than a sharp pop.

Hashknife stumbled over a little jack-pine and went to his knees while Sleepy unceremoniously sat down. And then the animal was gone. Evidently it had borne a rider. The wind prevented them from hearing which way it went.

Hashknife crawled back and found one of Sleepy's boots.

"Didn't hit yuh, did it?" yelled Hashknife.

"No! What do yuh make of it?"

"Queer thing to do, Sleepy."

They got back to their feet.

"How's the tooth?" asked Hashknife.

"Tooth? Oh, yeah. Say, I forgot it. Let's go."

They went ahead again, stumbling along, while the rain increased, and they began to be very uncomfortable. Added to their discomfort was the knowledge that they had lost all sense of direction. Hashknife knew they were traveling parallel to the river until they were shot at, and from that time on he wasn't sure of anything.

He felt they had traveled more than a mile, but they found no wagon-road. There were no stars to guide them, and the wind had shifted several times.

" 'We're lost, the captain shouted,' " declared Sleepy, as they halted against the bank of a washout, where the wind and rain did not strike them so heavily.

"That wind was blowin' from the north when we started, and we tried to foller the wind," laughed Hashknife. "Is yore tobacco wet?"

They rolled a smoke and considered things.

"I wish we was back in that nice warm caboose," said Sleepy. "Gosh, that shore was a comfortable place. But this is jist my luck. It makes five times we've started East with a train of cows—and never got out of the sagebrush."

"Aw, we'll pick 'em up in Pinnacle City, Sleepy."

"Yeah, that's great. But where's Pinnacle City?"

"Two miles from the railroad bridge."

"Good guesser."

"It can't be more than nine o'clock, Sleepy. By golly, there ought to be somebody livin' in this place-where-the-wind-comes-from."

"If they're all like that jigger we ran into back there, I don't care about meetin' 'em," declared Sleepy. "Anyway, the tooth has quit hurtin'. I think the swellin' busted when we stopped at the bridge. That engineer shore knows how to spike his mount's tail to the earth!"

"There's only three things that are botherin' me," said Hashknife. "One is: Why did that party take a shot at us? And the other two are my boots full of water."

"And there's another small matter," said Sleepy flapping his arms dismally. "We ain't taken any nourishment since this mornin', Hashknife."

"Yeah, there's that small matter," agreed Hashknife. "Oh, if yuh ever stop to check up on things, Sleepy, the world is all wrong. But never stop grinnin' and look back. The only place yuh ever see ghosts is behind yuh."

"Well, that wasn't no ghost that snapped his gun at us."

"He shore wasn't, cowboy. That jigger was plumb alive. Well, I dunno but what we might as well keep circlin'. Eventually we'll wear a trail, if we keep goin' long enough. I wish I knew which was south."

They sloshed away from the brush and headed down a slope.

"There's a light!" exclaimed Sleepy. "Straight ahead."

A flurry of rain obliterated the light, but it flickered again.

"Light in a winder," said Sleepy. "Must be a house."

"Must be," agreed Hashknife dryly. "Windows don't usually occur without a house in connection."

They struck a corral fence, followed it around to the stable and then headed for the house. It was the HJ ranch. But these two cowboys were far too wise to walk right up to a strange house in the dark, especially after having been shot at so recently; so they sidled up to the house and took a look through the window.

It was a side window of the living-room, and in the room were Peggy Wheeler, Laura Hatton and Honey Bee. It was evident to Hashknife and Sleepy that the living-room roof had sprung a leak and the three people were making an earnest endeavor to catch the water in a wash-tub, dishpan and numerous other receptacles.

A long dry period had warped the old shingles of the ranch-house to such an extent that they leaked like a sieve.

"Looks like a harmless place," observed Hashknife.

"And not a —— of a lot of advantage over bein' outside," said Sleepy. "Anyway, they look awful human."

They walked around to the front door, clumped up the steps and knocked on the door. Honey Bee answered the knock by opening the door about six inches and peering out.

"We just wondered if yuh didn't need a couple of good men to fix yore roof," said Hashknife seriously.

Honey opened the door a little and peered out at them. He had never seen either of them before, but the lamplight illuminated their faces enough to show their grins.

"Fix the roof?" he said slowly. "Oh, yeah. Well, I'll bet we do need help."

He opened the door.

"C'mon in out of the wet."

They shuffled the mud off their boots and came in. The two girls stood near the dining-room doorway, each of them holding a receptacle, looking curiously at Hashknife, who removed his dripping hat and grinned widely at them. Hashknife's grin was irresistible. Honey grinned foolishly and shuffled his feet.

"My name's Hartley," said Hashknife. "This soakin' wet object with me is named Stevens. He was sufferin' from a bad tooth, and we went huntin' a dentist in the rain."

"Yuh went huntin' a dentist?" queried Honey foolishly. "Wh-where didja expect to find one?"

"Sounds kinda queer," grinned Hashknife. "Yuh see, we was actin' as a couple of chambermaids to a train of cows, but the bridge caught on fire and we got stalled. Sleepy's tooth shore needed help; so we started out to find the wagon-bridge, figurin' to find this Pinnacle City. But we didn't find the bridge."

"Oh, yeah," Honey scratched his head. "The railroad bridge caught fire. Uh-huh. Ho-o-o-old on!"

He ran across the room, grabbed up a wash-basin and placed it under a fresh leak. Then he came back and introduced the girls to Hashknife and Sleepy.

"My name's Bee," he said. "B-e-e."

"Last or first?" asked Hashknife.

"Last. Say, I better rustle some wood for that fireplace. Kinda take the chill off the air. Gosh, you fellers shore are wet."

Honey hurried away for some wood, while Hashknife moved some of the containers to more advantageous spots. There seemed to be no end to the leaks in the HJ ranch-house.

"Terrible, isn't it?" smiled Peggy.

It seemed to her that these two strange cowboys, even with their wet garments and muddy boots, had brought a warmth and cheer to the ranch that was sorely needed.

"Oh, not so bad," said Hashknife, squinting at a leak. "Didja ever stop to think how much worse it would be if them few little spots were the only place where it didn't leak?"

"That would be terrible," declared Laura.

"Yeah, it would. But suppose it leaked everywhere. That would be worse, eh?"

"Do you always look at things that way?" asked Peggy.

"Mostly," said Hashknife seriously. "Why not, Miss Wheeler? Sunlight is brighter than shadows; and it's a lot easier to find, if yuh look for it. Bright things are easier to see than dark ones."

"You listen to him a while and he'll prove to yuh that a leaky roof is a godsend," laughed Sleepy.

"Well, ain't it?" asked Hashknife. "If this roof hadn't leaked, you folks would probably have been in bed—and we wouldn't have seen their light, Sleepy."

"That is true," said Laura. "Oh, it was way past bedtime at the HJ ranch!"

Honey came in with an armful of wood, which he threw in the big fireplace.

"I'm makin' a bet you fellers are hungry," he said.

"Never mind that," grinned Hashknife. "Point us the way to Pinnacle City, and we'll be on our way."

"Not in that rain," declared Peggy quickly.

She went into the kitchen, where she called Wong Lee.

"Aw, don't bother the cook," begged Hashknife. "Pshaw, it ain't worth it."

"It's no bother to Wong Lee," said Peggy. "You boys get over by that fire and dry out a little. Wong Lee will get you a meal, and Honey will show you where to sleep. Laura and I will go to bed. Good night, everybody."

"Good night, and thank yuh a thousand times."

Hashknife and Sleepy crossed the room and shook hands with the two girls. Peggy smiled at Hashknife.

"Thank you for coming," she said.

The two boys went back to the fire and removed some of their wet garments, after which Hashknife went back to the porch and got their water-proof war-bags, which contained some dry clothing. They could hear Wong Lee shuffling about the kitchen, preparing them a meal.

He came to the door and looked in on them. He was a little, wizen-faced Celestial.

"Yo' like some ham-egg?" he asked.

Hashknife grinned at him, but did not reply. A smile slowly stole across the Chinaman's face and he bobbed his head.

"Yessa, velly good," he said. "No tlouble."

"You kinda got the Injun sign on Wong Lee," grunted Honey. "Darned old rascal almost laughed. I tell yuh, he ain't even smiled since Jim Wheeler was killed."

"Thasso?" Hashknife borrowed Sleepy's tobacco and rolled a cigaret. "What happened to Jim Wheeler?"

"Horse dragged him to death the other day."

Hashknife shuddered. The thought of a man's hanging by one foot to a stirrup never failed to rasp his nerves. He had seen men die that way, and once when he was but a youngster he had been thrown from a wild horse and had hung from a stirrup. Luckily the horse had whirled into a fence corner, where another cowboy was able to hold the animal and extricate Hashknife.

"Tough way to die," said Hashknife.

"Y'betcha," nodded Honey. "Head all busted up on the rocks, and his leg twisted. Golly, it shore was awful! He owned this HJ outfit. I work for the Flyin' H, but I'm down here kinda helpin' out. Hozie, Jim's brother, owns the Flyin' H."

"Miss Wheeler is Jim's daughter, eh?"

"Uh-huh. It's shore been a hard time for her, Hartley," Honey lowered his voice. "She was engaged to marry Joe Rich, and he got drunk on his weddin' night. Didn't show up. Then Peggy aims to go East with Laura Hatton. Yuh see, Jim wasn't awful well heeled with money. He owes the Pinnacle bank quite a lot; so he borrows five thousand from Ed Merrick, who owns the Circle M, and gives Ed his note.

"Ed gives him the money, and Jim starts home with it. And that's the last anybody ever seen of the money. Joe Rich was aimin' to pull out of the country; so he comes out to tell Peggy good-by. And Joe was the one who found Jim Wheeler. Hozie Wheeler and Lonnie Myers comes ridin' along just a little later, and found Joe with Jim.

"And when the sheriff finds out about the missin' money, he tries tc make Joe wait for an investigation, and Joe pops him through the gun-arm. That's the last we saw of Joe. There's a reward for him, and the sheriff has been ridin' the hocks off his horse, but ain't found nothin'. So yuh can see it's been awful tough for Peggy."

Hashknife had been standing on one foot like a stork, holding the other foot out to the blazing fire, while Honey sketched his story. Sleepy hunched down, his back to the fire, his damp hair straggling down over his forehead.

"I wonder," he said, "if it ain't stopped rainin' enough for us to go on to town? We don't want to miss that train, Hashknife."

"Joe Rich was the sheriff," said Honey, as an afterthought. "But he resigned the mornin' after he got drunk. They made a sheriff out of his deputy. Jim Wheeler knocked Joe down that mornin', but Joe didn't do anythin', they say."

"And it hadn't ought to take long to

fix that bridge," said Sleepy. "This rain would put the fire out."

"What kind of a jigger was this Joe Rich?" asked Hashknife curiously.

"Jist salt of the earth, Hartley."

"Uh-huh," thoughtfully. "And got so drunk he forgot to get married, eh?"

"Yeah, that's true," sighed Honey. "I dunno why he did; and he never said."

"Didn't have no quarrel with the girl?"

"——, no! Aw, it was to be a big marriage. I was to be best man. My ——, I almost crippled myself for life, tryin' to wear number six shoes."

"You come eat now?" asked Wong Lee.

Honey sat down with them. Sleepy looked gloomily at Hashknife and reminded him gently that sugar was for the coffee, and not for the eggs.

Hashknife chuckled, but sobered quickly. The rain still pattered on the old roof and dripped off the eaves. It was warm in the kitchen.

"Five thousand dollars is a lot of money," mused Hashknife, stirring his coffee with a fork. He had used the same fork to dip sugar from the bowl and did not seem to realize that it had all leaked out.

Sleepy knew the symptoms and groaned inwardly. Years of association with Hashknife had taught Sleepy to recognize the sudden moods of the tall cowboy. Trouble and mystery affected Hashknife as the scent of upland fowl affects a pointer.

Hashknife, in the days of his callow youth, had been known as George. His father, an itinerant minister in the Milk River country and head of a big family, had had little time or money to do more than just let this boy grow up. As soon as he was able to sit in a saddle he lived with the cowboys and became one of them.

Blessed with a balanced mind, possibly inherited from his father, who surely needed a balanced mind to make both ends meet, the boy struck out for himself, absorbing all kinds of knowledge, studying human nature. Eventually he drifted to the ranch, which gave him his nickname, and here he met the grinning Sleepy Stevens, whose baptismal name was David.

From the Hashknife ranch their trail led to many places. Soldiers of fortune they became, although Hashknife referred to themselves as cow-punchers of disaster. From the wide lands of Alberta to the Mexican Border they had left their mark. They did not stay long in any place, unless fate decreed that a certain time must elapse before their work was finished. And then they would go on, possibly poorer in pocket. Their life had made them fatalists, had made them very human. To salve their own consciences they declared that they were looking for the right spot to settle down; a place to live out the rest of their life in peaceable pursuits.

But down in their hearts they knew that this place did not exist. They wanted to see the other side of the hill. Hashknife's brain rebelled against a mystery. It seemed to challenge him to combat. Where range detectives had failed utterly because they were unable to see beyond actual facts, Hashknife's analytical mind had enabled him to build up chains of evidence that had cleared up mystery after mystery.

But solving mysteries was not a business with them. They did not pose as detectives. It merely happened that fate threw them into contact with these things. Sleepy's mind did not function with any more rapidity than that of any average man, but he was blessed with a vast sense of humor, bulldog tenacity and a faculty for using a gun when a gun was most needed.

Whether it was merely a pose or not, Sleepy always tried to prevent Hashknife from getting interested in these mysteries of the range country. He argued often and loud, but to no avail. But once started, Sleepy worked as diligently as Hashknife. Neither of them were wizards with their guns. No amount of persuasion would induce them to compete with others in marksmanship, nor did they ever practise drawing a gun.

"Leave that to the gun-men," Hashknife had said. "We're not gun-men."

Which was something that many men would take great pains to disprove, along the back-trail of Hashknife and Sleepy.

And right now, while he ate heavily of the HJ food, Sleepy Stevens knew he was being dragged into the whirlpool of the Tumbling River range. He could tell by the twitch of Hashknife's nose, by the calculating squint of his gray eyes; and if that was not enough—Hashknife was cutting a biscuit with a knife and fork.

"Five thousand is a lot of money for the HJ to lose," agreed Honey. "Take that along with the seven thousand owin' to the

Pinnacle City bank and it jist about nails the HJ hide to the floor and leaves it there to starve."

"Was Jim Wheeler a sickly man?" asked Hashknife.

"Sickly? Not a bit; he was built like a bull."

"Drink much?"

"Hardly ever took a drink."

"Ride a bad horse?"

"Been ridin' the same one three years, and it never made a bobble. Jim's bronc-scratchin' days was over, Hartley."

"Uh-huh," Hashknife rubbed his chin with the fork. "Was it goin' to take five thousand dollars for to ship that girl back East?"

"Probably not."

"What kind of a feller is Ed Merrick?"

"Good cow-man. He's one of the county commissioners. Owned the Circle M about five years, and is kind of a big man in the county. Mostly horse outfit."

"Yuh say they made a sheriff out of the deputy?"

"Yeah; Len Kelsey."

Honey described the trouble on the street between Kelsey and Rich, in which Kelsey was wounded. He also told them how the cowboys hid out to keep from being sworn in to follow the fugitive. This interested Sleepy.

"Sounds like there was some reg'lar boys around here," he said.

"Oh, the boys like Joe," grinned Honey. "You'd like him."

"I dunno. Any man that ain't got no more sense than to get drunk and miss a chance of a wife like that dark-haired girl ain't very much of a feller. Or the blonde one."

"The blonde one is my girl," said Honey softly.

Sleepy reached impulsively across the table and shook hands with Honey, who looked foolish.

"I'm glad yuh told me," said Sleepy seriously. "Prob'ly save me a lot of heart-aches. She's a dinger."

Hashknife shoved back from the table, thanking Wong Lee for his hospitality.

"Velly good," Wong Lee bobbed his head. "No tlouble. You come some mo'."

"Mebbe we will, Wong."

"All lite; I cook plenty."

The rain had increased again, and Honey advised them against attempting to go to Pinnacle City. It was not difficult to convince them. Sleepy's tooth did not ache any more, and their clothes were beginning to dry; so they followed Honey down to the dry bunk-house and went to bed.

IT DID not take the rain long to extinguish the fire at the bridge, and after an examination the train crews decided that it was still safe. Many of the timbers were badly charred, and but for the heavy rain which followed the wind, the whole bridge would have been doomed.

The cattle-train, minus two of the cow-hands, proceeded slowly to Pinnacle City, where it took the siding. It would spend several hours there, watering stock, and the man in charge expected Hashknife and Sleepy to put in an appearance before leaving time.

The passenger train drew in at the station, possibly an hour late. The wires being down, it was impossible for them to get orders. The heavy rain swept the wooden platform, but the depot agent trundled out some express packages. The express car door was partly open, but there was no messenger.

The agent climbed into the car, and the first thing that greeted his eye was the through safe, almost in the center of the car, its door torn open. A single car light burned in the upper end of the car, and it was there that the agent found the messenger, bound hand and foot.

Running back to the depot, the agent told what he had found, and the train crew hurried to the car, while another man went to get an officer. In the waiting room of the depot the express messenger told what he knew of the robbery. A man had struck him over the head, and he was a trifle hazy about what had happened.

The man had boarded the car at Kelo. The messenger said he had received several packages from the agent at Kelo, and had gone to place them before closing the door. The wind was blowing a gale, and he did not hear the man come in. In fact he merely surmised that the man got on at Kelo, because as far as he knew there was no other man than himself on the car when they stopped at Kelo.

At any rate, the man had forced him at the point of a revolver to close and lock the door, and had made him sit down and wait for the train to pull out. There was

quite a long delay, and the bandit seemed rather nervous.

In fact he grew so nervous that he knocked the messenger unconscious with his gun, and the messenger didn't know that the safe had been blown open. He dimly remembered a loud noise, but was in no shape to find out what it was. Anyway, the robber had bound and placed him behind some trunks out of the way of the explosion.

He was just a little sick all over, yet he gave Len Kelsey a fairly good description of the robber—as good as usually is given. A masked man of medium height. Might have been tall, or possibly short. Wore black sombrero, striped shirt, overalls and boots. No vest. The shirt might have been blue and white—or red and green. The messenger wasn't sure. He noted particularly that the robber had a six-shooter in his right hand, and that he wore leather cuffs—black leather, with silver stars in a circle around the upper edge of the cuffs.

"Was there any money in the safe?" asked Len.

"A lot of it," declared the messenger. "I don't know how much. I'd like to see a doctor about my head."

Slim Coleman, of the Lazy B, happened to be there at the depot, and he walked back with Len Kelsey.

"What do yuh think about it, Len?" he asked.

"I dunno," lied Len.

Slim had noted the expression of Len's face when the messenger told about the leather cuffs.

When Joe Rich had left Pinnacle City he was wearing a blue and white striped shirt, black sombrero, overalls and a pair of black leather cuffs, on which were riveted a lot of small, silver stars. Joe had done the decorating himself, and Slim knew that no other cowboy in the Tumbling River country wore a cuff like Joe's.

Len did not seem inclined to talk about it, so Slim went back to the depot, where old Doctor Curzon was bandaging up the messenger's head. A drink of raw liquor had helped to make the messenger more sociable and willing to talk.

"You got a good look at his gun, didn't yuh?" asked Slim.

"I felt it," smiled the messenger, wincing slightly from Doctor Curzon's ministrations.

"What did it look like?"

"Very large caliber—about six inches in diameter." The man laughed at his description. "Weighed a ton. Seriously, I can't describe it, but it seems to me that it had a white handle. Perhaps it was yellow, like bone. You know what I mean—not pearl. It was a Colt, I am sure."

Slim sighed deeply.

"Man wear any rings on his fingers?"

"I didn't see any."

Slim went back uptown. Joe Rich carried a Colt .45 with a yellow bone handle. Slim remembered when Joe had carved out those pieces of bone, working for days, at odd times, shaping the grip to fit his hand. Slim didn't know of another cow-puncher in the country that carried a bone-handled gun.

The news spread quickly around the town that the safe of the passenger train had been blown by a lone bandit who wore silver stars on his cuffs and carried a bone-handled gun. Joe Rich's name did not need to be mentioned. Len Kelsey did nothing, because there was nothing to be done. The telegraph wires were down and there was no use in his riding out into the storm. Even if the robber did get out at the river bridge, the storm would wipe out any tracks he might make, and even if there were no storm, how could he track one man?

Len Kelsey was very wise. He stayed at home where it was warm and dry, and went to bed. He had sufficient description to prove who had pulled the job, and he had already worn out two perfectly good horses trying to find this elusive young man.

CHAPTER VI

HASHKNIFE SMELLS A RAT

SOMETIME during that night the trouble shooters for the telegraph company had repaired the break, and this enabled the despatchers to straighten out the trains. The cattle-train headed out of Pinnacle City the following morning, minus two cowboys.

The depot agent knew about this, and told Len Kelsey that there were two lost cow-punchers somewhere on the east side of the river. The agent knew from what he had heard the crew of the cattle-train say that these men had left the train, intending to walk down to the wagon-bridge.

But he also knew they had taken their warbags with them and had buckled on their belts and guns before leaving the train.

"Kinda looks as though they intended missin' the train," said Kelsey.

"Might be worth investigating, Sheriff. The passenger was close behind the cattle-train for a long time out there by the bridge. And that express messenger had been hit so hard on the head that he wasn't sure of anything."

"Sure—I'll look into it," agreed Len. "I won't leave any stone unturned."

He had read this in a book, and it sounded like the proper thing for a sheriff to say.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy did not mention to Peggy that Honey Bee had told them about her troubles. She was in good spirits that morning, and even Wong Lee sang at his work. Laura told Honey that Peggy had talked quite a while about the tall cowboy and his wonderful grin—and Honey told Hashknife about it.

"Didn't either of 'em mention me?" asked Sleepy. "No? That's tough. But how could I grin, with my jaw all swelled? But that's jist my luck!"

Honey offered to take them to Pinnacle City in the buggy. They were hitching up the horses when Len Kelsey and Jack Ralston rode in.

"Now, what do them —— whippoorwills want?" growled Honey. "That's the sheriff and deputy."

"What had we ought to do—put up our hands?" asked Sleepy.

The two officers dismounted and spoke to Honey.

"Howdy," growled Honey.

Hashknife could plainly see that Honey Bee did not care for these two officers of the law.

Len Kelsey studied Hashknife and Sleepy for a moment.

"I reckon you boys are the two missin' members of the cattle-train outfit, eh?"

"If there's two missin'—we're both of 'em," said Hashknife gravely. "Has the train left Pinnacle City?"

"Before daylight."

"Stranded again," groaned Sleepy. "I'll never see the East, that's a cinch."

Hashknife hitched up his belt and leaned against the buggy.

"Yuh wasn't exactly lookin' for us, was yuh?" he asked.

"I don't hardly think so," replied Kelsey. "The safe on the express car of the passenger train that stopped back of yuh at the bridge last night was dynamited somewhere between Kelo and Pinnacle City."

Hashknife and Sleepy exchanged a quick glance. That might explain why a shot had been fired at them in the dark. They had blundered into the bandit who was making his getaway.

"For gosh sake!" snorted Honey. "Did they get much, Len?"

"Dunno how much. One man pulled the job, Honey—a man who wore black leather cuffs with silver stars, and a bone handled six-shooter."

"Leather cuffs with silver stars and bone—" Honey stopped and came in closer to the sheriff.

"Are yuh sure of that, Len?"

"That's the messenger's description."

"Well, for gosh sake!"

Honey looked toward the house, shaking his head sadly.

"You recognize the description?" asked Hashknife.

"Joe Rich," said Honey. "He made the stars and put 'em on a pair of black cuffs and he made the bone handles for his gun. Yuh say yuh don't know how much he got, Len?"

"No, I don't, Honey. But it was enough, I reckon."

"Uh-huh. Excuse me, I forgot to introduce you gents."

After the introduction they all sat down on the steps of the bunk-house and rolled smokes. Hashknife did not tell the sheriff about the shot that was fired at them in the dark.

"I dunno just where to start," admitted Kelsey. "I've been huntin' Joe Rich all over these hills, and now he comes back and robs a train right under my nose."

Kelsey, who was still wearing his arm in a sling, noticed Hashknife looking at it.

"A little souvenir of makin' a fool move," he said.

"Yeah, I heard about it," nodded Hashknife. "Joe Rich must be pretty fast with a gun, eh?"

"Fast enough," growled Kelsey. "Funny, ain't it? Here I was his deputy all this time, and now I'm huntin' him. Don't seem right."

"Are yuh dead sure it is?" asked Hashknife seriously.

Kelsey looked quickly at him.

"Dead sure?" Kelsey laughed shortly. "Well, about as sure as anythin' could be, Hartley. I dunno what got into Joe. He was sure strong on enforcin' the law, and now he seems just as strong on breakin' it."

"Them's the kind that go wrong—when they do go," said Ralston.

"Yeah, you know a —— of a lot about it," snorted Honey.

"Well, it allus works out that way."

"It does, eh? I suppose yuh knowed two months ago that Joe Rich would turn out bad. What do yuh use—palmistry or one of them glass balls?"

"Aw, yuh don't need to get sore, Honey."

"Thasso? Every time I think about Joe, I get sore. I wish I knowed where he was hidin' out."

"Me, too," grinned Kelsey. "I'd be a thousand better off."

"Yea-a-a-ah? Well, when you find out where he is, yuh better take plenty of help along to get him, Len; two of yuh ain't enough."

Kelsey could see that the argument might wax rather hot; so he got to his feet, stretched wearily and told Ralston they better be going. Nobody asked them to stay. Honey looked after them morosely.

"Don't like 'em, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"No! You boys go ahead and hitch up the team. I've got to tell the girls about that robbery. I sure as —— hate to tell Peggy that they think Joe pulled that job, but I'd rather tell her than to have her get it from somebody else."

The team was hitched when Honey came back, and he drove out to the main road.

"How did she take it?" asked Hashknife.

Honey looked at Hashknife, a pained expression on his face.

"A-a-a-aw, ——!" he said explosively.

"Does she believe it?"

"Huh! I dunno what she believes. Yuh can't tell nothin' about a woman, Hartley. She didn't say anythin'. I was wonderin' if she heard what I told her, but I reckon she did. Anyway she didn't say anythin'—jist walked away."

They jolted along over the rough road. Honey turned to Hashknife, a grin on his lips.

"I ain't no gentleman," he said.

"Ain't yuh?" asked Hashknife.

"Nossir," Honey shook his head violently. "Can't lie good enough. Laura said I ought to be crowned with an ax-handle for comin' in and tellin' Peggy that Joe Rich robbed the train. She said I should have lied about it."

"Mebbe yuh should."

"Cinch! Giddap! I always think of a lie too late. Some day I'm goin' to be hung for tellin' the truth."

"You'll be the first puncher that ever had that honor," said Sleepy. "There's that bridge we was huntin' for, Hashknife. If we'd 'a' found it last night, we'd be on our way East right now."

"Glad yuh didn't," grinned Honey, as they rattled over the loose floor-planks of the bridge. "It's only a little ways out here to where Jim Wheeler was killed. I'll show yuh the place."

He drove off the bridge and around to the spot where Joe had found Jim Wheeler. Honey knew the exact spot and drew just off the road. Hashknife walked up and down the road while Honey explained things to him. The rain of the night before had laid the dust, and the road was almost as smooth as asphalt.

After looking the place over they rode on to Pinnacle City, where they met Uncle Hozie Wheeler and Aunt Emma. Honey introduced them to Hashknife and Sleepy, and told how they happened to be in the Tumbling River country.

They had heard about the train robbery. It seemed to be the general opinion that Joe Rich had done it.

"I knowed him a long time," said Uncle Hozie. "He never struck me as bein' a bad boy in any way. I don't *sabe* him. Why he jist went all to —— in a week!"

"Does Peggy know about it?" asked Aunt Emma.

"Yeah," Honey nodded solemnly. "Yeah, she knows. But I've told her the last bad news I'll ever tell."

"Took it hard, did she, Honey?"

"I dunno. She never said anythin'. Laura give me ——. Sometimes I think that girl don't care for the truth. Oh, if she wants lies, I reckon I can supply her."

Uncle Hozie and Aunt Emma were going to ride out to the HJ to see the girls. Curt Bellew and Ed Merrick were at the Pinnacle. They shook hands with Honey, who introduced Hashknife and Sleepy.

"What do yuh think of Joe Rich now?" asked Curt, after he had invited them to share his hospitality.

"Jist the same as I always did," declared Honey. "Somethin' has gone wrong with the boy. How's the Circle M, Merrick?"

"All right, Honey. I'll bet yore old ranch-house leaked last night."

"Did it? My gosh, I'll betcha it did. Ask Hartley and Stevens; they showed up in the rain. Yuh see, they was on that stalled cow-train, and Stevens had a tooth-ache; so they tried to find their way to the wagon-bridge in order to get to town. But I reckon they got kinda lost, and ended up at the HJ."

Merrick laughed.

"I don't believe I could have found my way either—as well as I know the country. Whew! It sure was dark and wet. My place didn't leak, but it got damp. Are you boys goin' to be with us a while?"

"I dunno," Hashknife leaned an elbow on the bar and began rolling a cigaret. "It looks as though Fate kinda dropped us off here for some reason or other."

"Too bad it's the slack season. I'm short two men of my regular crew, but there ain't enough work for me and Ben Collins and 'Dutch' Seibert. Later on I might use yuh."

"I loaned Honey to the HJ," laughed Bellew. "I've still got Eph Harper and Slim Coleman on my hands. Ma says that's two men too many. She allus says I'm tryin' to make a mountain out of a mole-hill—meanin' that I can't ever hire enough men to make the Lazy B a big cow-outfit."

While they were drinking a man came in whom the bartender seemed to know. It was the telegraph operator at the depot. He bought a drink and a cigar.

"I suppose the sheriff is hunting bandits," he said.

"We seen him out at the HJ this mornin'," offered Honey.

The man nodded.

"I was just over to his office, but there wasn't anybody home. Had a telegram for him from Ransome. They found a little gold penknife in the express car. It didn't belong to the messenger, he said. The wire said there were the initials J. R. on the handle."

"J. R.?" said Honey. "Little gold knife! My gosh, that's the knife Peggy gave Joe for his birthday!"

"I dunno," said the man vacantly. "All I know is what the wire said. I reckon it will keep until the sheriff gets back."

He went out, and Merrick laughed softly.

"He guesses it will keep. Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Honey leaned on the bar and looked dismally at himself in the mirror.

"I'll not tell Peggy," he declared, but amended it with, "I might come right out and tell her that if anybody says they found Joe Rich's gold knife on that car—they lie."

"Why even mention it?" asked Hashknife.

"Mebbe that's the best thing to do. Oh, they've got Joe cinched!"

"But he overlooked one bet," said Hashknife thoughtfully.

"What was that?" asked Merrick.

"He forgot to carve his name on the safe."

"Is that meant to be serious?" asked Merrick.

"No-o-o-o," drawled Hashknife. "I suppose I'm jokin'."

"Aw, he wouldn't write his name on the safe," said Honey.

"Might as well," grinned Hashknife. "It sure shows that Joe is a beginner at the game. A regular hold-up man don't tag his work thataway."

Merrick looked seriously at Hashknife.

"You talk as though you were familiar with hold-up men, Hartley."

"No; I just use common sense, Merrick."

"Uh-huh. Well, it's a good thing to use. A lot of us don't do it."

"No, that's true," admitted Hashknife seriously.

Merrick scratched his chin and turned back to the bar. He wasn't exactly sure whether this tall, level-eyed cowboy was making fun of him or not. He had the feeling that he was, but there was nothing to justify this feeling. Both of the strange cowboys were very serious of face, and Sleepy's blue eyes looked entirely innocent. But Merrick did not know that Sleepy's innocent blue eyes were his greatest asset.

"I wonder if the sheriff's office had anythin' to go on this mornin'," said Merrick.

"Couple of horses," replied Sleepy. "Now let me buy a drink, will yuh?"

"I've got to go kinda easy," said Curt Bellew. "I git down here and lap up liquor, and have to eat cloves all the way back to the ranch."

"And then prove why yuh ate cloves," grinned Honey.

"Sure. Honey, if yo're a wise boy, you'll stay sober and single."

"A-a-aw, I don't drink much, Curt."

"Yuh don't get married much either, do yuh?"

"Well," laughed Honey, "I won't get drunk and forget to get married."

Bellew and Merrick left the saloon and a few minutes later Honey, Hashknife and Sleepy stocked up on tobacco and rode back to the HJ.

"I feel foolish goin' back there," said Hashknife. "Kinda looks as though we were imposin' on yuh."

"Yuh throw that in a can," said Honey. "Yo're welcome to stay as long as yuh can. I can't quite *sabe* you two boys."

"Jist in what way?"

"Well, I never seen yuh before until last night. Yuh come in and I forget that I don't know yuh. I tell yuh all about the trouble, and—well, yuh know what I mean don'tcha? It jist seemed the natural thing, to do. And Wong Lee took to yuh. Wong's kinda funny thataway.

"Why, sometimes the boys from the Circle M stop here. Yuh see they go past here to their ranch from town. Wong ain't never spoken to one of 'em. Other fellers show up here at meal-time, and Wong says nothin'. But he shore talked to yuh, and promised yuh more meals. Do dogs ever foller yuh?"

"Sometimes," laughed Hashknife.

"I'll betcha. Never bite yuh, do they?"

"Haven't yet."

"Never will. Huh!" Honey jerked up on the lines. "I know what the word is. I read somethin' about it in a magazine. It's called personality. Know what it means, Hartley?"

"Yeah, I think I do."

"Well, that's what you've got. Giddap, broncs! Joe Rich had it. His must 'a' back-fired on him."

Hashknife laughed. Honey Bee was so sincere in his statements.

"Was Rich a good sheriff?" asked Hashknife.

"Y'betcha. Joe was a man that wouldn't stop at anythin' to enforce the law. Some men kinda play fav'rites, yuh know. But Joe wasn't that kind. At least I don't reckon he was, and I knew him awful well."

"How did it happen that you wasn't his deputy?"

"Politics," explained Honey. "Merrick controls a lot of votes in this county, and he told Joe he'd support him if he'd appoint Len Kelsey deputy. Joe agreed, and it was the Merrick vote that won for Joe."

"Who was the other candidate?"

"John Leeds, of Ransome. He's a hard old customer, Hartley. He was sheriff before Joe was elected, and he made a lot of enemies. Pretty smart, too. I'll betcha, if old John was sheriff he'd 'a' been on the trail of that robber before daylight. He was a sticker, old John was, and nobody ever told him what to do. Mebbe that's why he got beat."

They drove along to where Jim Wheeler had been killed, and Hashknife leaned out of the buggy. But he did not say anything. They drove across the bridge and to the HJ, where they saw the Flying H buggy team tied to the front porch.

"Uncle Hozie and Aunt Emma," said Honey. "They're salt of the earth, gents. Always tryin' to do somethin' for yuh. Aunt Emma hops all over yuh for doin' somethin', but all the time she's laughin' inside at yuh. They don't make 'em any better. Hozie and Jim was pretty thick, and it hurt Hozie to see old Jim pass out. He didn't say much—but that's his way. Tears don't show much—except moisture."

Hashknife and Sleepy went to the bunkhouse, and did not see Uncle Hozie and his wife until they were ready to drive away. Honey had told them about the gold-handled knife, but did not tell Peggy. A little later Ed Merrick stopped on his way out to the Circle M and talked with the three cowboys about the robbery of the night before. He was expecting a horse buyer from Kelo, so did not linger long.

"How are prices in this range?" asked Hashknife.

"Depends on the buyer," replied Merrick. "Some of 'em play square with yuh. The horse market ain't very strong, and we have to almost take what's offered. This buyer wants quite a lot of horses, so he says."

"For Eastern market?"

"Yeah, I think so. Anyway, the buyer is from the East."

Merrick rode away and a few minutes later Wong Lee rang the dinner bell. Peggy and Laura did not eat with the boys, but a little later Hashknife wandered around the rear of the house and found Peggy sitting

on an old bench in the shade of the cottonwoods, a picture of abject lonesomeness.

Hashknife squatted down on his heels against the tree and rolled a cigaret. Neither of them had spoken. Peggy sighed and leaned back against the bole of the tree, watching Hashknife's long, lean fingers fashion a cigaret.

"My, it's shore peaceful out here!" said Hashknife.

Peggy nodded slowly.

"Yes, it is peaceful."

"It kinda looks as though we were imposin' on yuh."

"You are not," declared Peggy quickly. "I'm glad you came. And I don't know why I'm glad. Queer, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it's queer. Life's a queer thing. Yesterday we were on our way East in that caboose, when the bridge caught fire and changed everythin'. Yuh never know what will come tomorrow."

"I realize that, Mr. Hartley. I suppose Honey has told you of the things that have happened lately."

"Well, yeah, I reckon we've heard quite a lot about it, ma'am. It shore was tough luck. Are yuh goin' away with Miss Hatton?"

"No; I can't."

"Uh-huh."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," she said wearily. "You see, I've got to stay and see that things are straightened up. Dad owed the bank seven thousand. Oh, I wish he had let things go as they were! I didn't need that trip. He was so thoughtful of me, and he thought I'd like to get away for a while. Now he's gone, and the ranch—we'll have to sell everything in order to pay the debts."

"That's shore tough. Miss Wheeler, I'd like to know more about Joe Rich. I don't like to be personal, but I'd like to get yore opinion of him."

"My opinion?" Peggy laughed bitterly. "I don't think it is worth much, Mr. Hartley."

"Yore honest opinion, I mean."

"My honest opinion?"

"Yeah. Yuh see we all have two opinions on things like that—the one we express and the one we hide."

"I—I think I know what you mean, Mr. Hartley."

"Fine. I wish you'd leave the mister off my name. All my friends call me Hashknife. When anybody says 'Mr. Hartley' I look around to see who they're speakin' to. Now, yuh jist go ahead and tell me about Joe Rich."

Peggy looked earnestly at Hashknife.

"Why should I? Why do you wish to know about Joe Rich—my opinion of him? Who are you, anyway?"

Hashknife studied his boot-toes for several moments, but finally looked up at her with a grin in his eyes.

"It's kinda queer," he admitted. "But I'm one of them funny folks who always asks questions. All my life I've asked a lot of questions, Miss Wheeler. Sometimes I find out things. I'm like the feller who said he made up his mind to kiss every pretty woman he met. Somebody said—

" 'I'll bet you got whipped a lot of times,' and he said—

" 'Well, yeah, I did, but I shore got a lot of kisses.'

"And that's the way with me—except that I was after answers instead of kisses."

Peggy laughed with him.

"But I don't see yet," she said. "What good will my opinion do you? What do you want to know about Joe Rich?"

"Well, it's like this, Miss Wheeler: Yore opinion of him will go quite a ways with me. If I was to come right out and ask yuh if yuh loved Joe Rich in spite of everythin' he's done to yuh—what would yuh say?"

Peggy turned her head away and rested her chin on her hand. After a space of time she shook her head.

"That isn't a fair question," she said softly.

"No, but yuh gave me a fair answer," said Hashknife. "I'd like to shake hands with yuh, Miss Wheeler."

Wonderingly she shook hands with him, and he smiled down at her, his gray eyes twinkling.

"But I—I didn't answer you," she said, choking slightly.

"Oh, yes yuh did, Peggy. I'm goin' to call yuh Peggy. If yuh can love him in spite of everythin' he's done, by golly, he's worth savin' for yuh."

"Worth saving?" Peggy got to her feet. "I don't understand. How can you save him?"

"I dunno exactly," Hashknife scratched his head, tilting his sombrero over one eye. "But there ain't nothin' that can't be done."

"But what could save him? Why, they're hunting for him now—offering a big reward."

The tears came into her eyes and she turned away. Hashknife patted her on the shoulder.

"Keep smilin'," he said softly. "Remember how it was here last night? All wind and rain, wasn't it? And today the sun is shinin' and the sky is blue. Life's like that, Peggy. The old sky gets pretty black and all clouded up, but the old sun is always on the job, and it breaks through eventually."

"It is wonderful to look at things in that way, Hashknife."

"I think so, Peggy. My old man was that way. He preached the gospel in bunk-houses and out on the range. But he didn't wear a long face and say long prayers. He said he wasn't trying to make folks fit to die—he was makin' 'em fit to live. And after all, that's the gospel. If yo're fit to live, yuh'll be fit to die. And when yo're fit to live yuh'll always see the sun behind the clouds."

Peggy smiled at him through her tears.

"I'm glad you came here," she said simply, and went back to the house.

Hashknife sat down on the bench and rolled a fresh cigaret. Sleepy had been sitting on the bunk-house steps, but now he came up to Hashknife and sat down beside him.

"Well, what do yuh know, cowboy?" queried Sleepy.

"What do I know?" Hashknife grinned wistfully at his smoke. "I know I've bit off a —— of a big chew for one man to masticate."

"Yeah," nodded Sleepy, "yuh mostly always do, Hashknife."

"Uh-huh. Where's Honey?"

"Settin' on the front porch with Laura. By golly, if this keeps up I'm goin' to get me a squaw! You at one end of the place and Honey at the other. While Mister Stevens sets on the bunk-house steps all alone. And he's the best-lookin' man on the ranch, too."

"Who is—Honey?"

"Na-a-aw—Stevens! Honey's second."

"And I'm third," grinned Hashknife."

"Sure," said Sleepy. "Wong Lee don't count, because he's a Chinaman."

"I'm glad one entry is scratched. There goes the sheriff and his hired hand."

Len Kelsey and Jack Ralston rode past, heading for the old bridge.

"Reckon they didn't have very good luck," observed Sleepy. "That must 'a' been Joe Rich we almost ran into in the rain. He was just makin' his getaway, eh?"

"Looks thataway, Sleepy. Mebbe we should 'a' told the sheriff about it."

"That wouldn't help him any; yuh can't foller horse tracks."

"No, yuh can't," agreed Hashknife getting up. "I reckon we better go down and see how many ridin' rigs there are on this place, and pick out a horse."

"Yuh mean to stay here a while, Hashknife?"

"It ain't an unpleasant place, is it?"

"No-o-o, but—"

"Yuh didn't hope to catch that train, didja?"

"The cattle-train? Certainly not."

"Have yuh got any other place you'd like to go to?"

"No-o-o-o, I reckon not, Hashknife."

"Fine! Then yuh don't mind stayin' a day or so, eh?"

They looked seriously at each other for a moment and both grinned widely as they headed for the stable.

CHAPTER VII

CITY VS. RANGE

THE following day William H. Cates, special investigator of the Wells-Fargo, came to Pinnacle City, and went into a lengthy session with Len Kelsey and Jack Ralston. Cates was a big, burly man with a square jaw and blue eyes. In fifteen minutes he knew as much as Kelsey did about the robbery and the life of Joe Rich.

Cates' questions were snappy and to the point. But what he learned was of little value to him. Cates was a city man, an ex-detective of San Francisco. He knew much more about pavements than he did about ranges, and he was not egotistical enough to expect much success in this case.

"The idea seems to be—get Joe Rich," he said.

"Yeah, that's the idea," agreed Kelsey, resting his heels on the desk. "But how are yuh goin' to get him, pardner?"

"We've been after him for days," grumbled Ralston.

"He got over twenty thousand that last haul," said the detective.

"My gosh, was there that much in the safe?" exploded Kelsey. "Whew!"

"That much, at least, Sheriff. The company are offering a reward of twenty-five hundred."

"I didn't know they carried that much," said Ralston.

"Well, they do. Sometimes more, sometimes less."

"Well, what do yuh propose doin'?" asked Kelsey.

"Keep looking for Joe Rich, I suppose. You say he's got a lot of friends around here?"

Kelsey nodded glumly, remembering how the cowboys had avoided riding after Joe.

"Yeah, yuh can't expect much help, Cates. They'll all spot yuh—and these cow-punchers can shore be clams."

"Oh, I'm not going out to hunt him" smiled Cates. "I'd be a fool to do that. When you boys can't find him—what could I do? I don't know this country. Why, I haven't been on a horse for fifteen years!

"Nope," Cates sighed deeply. "This is no job for a man like me. What this needs is a man like Hashknife Hartley."

"Hashknife Hartley?"

Kelsey pricked up his ears and took his feet off the desk. Jack Ralston showed proper interest.

Cates nodded slowly as he bit the end off a cigar.

"Yes, he might do something with it. Ever hear of him?"

"What about him?" asked Kelsey quickly.

Cates smiled as he puffed his cigar.

"I never met him," he said slowly. "One of those sage-brush *Sherlocks*, I suppose. Maybe I hadn't ought to make fun of him—he did some good work for my company. Oh, I've heard a lot about what he has done. It's our business to keep track of all those things, you see. But some of it sounds rather mythical."

"Well, that's shore funny," said Kelsey. "There's a Hartley and Stevens out at the HJ ranch right now."

"Eh? Cates stared at Kelsey. "Hashknife Hartley?"

"I dunno; name's Hartley."

"Stevens? Huh! Say, I believe he has a partner by that name. Wouldn't that be funny if it was Hashknife Hartley. How do you get out to that HJ ranch?"

"We can take yuh out, Cates."

"Fine. But how do they happen to be here?"

Kelsey told him about the burning bridge and the stalled cattle-train.

"But do yuh reckon they'll work on the case?" asked Jack Ralston.

"We can soon find out. I'm curious to see him. It may not be the same man, but we can soon find that out, too."

Kelsey obtained a buggy at the livery-stable, in which he and Cates rode out to the HJ, while Ralston followed them on horseback. But they did not find Hashknife and Sleepy at the ranch. Kelsey introduced Cates to the two girls, and Cates found out that Hartley's name was Hashknife.

"They rode away this morning with Honey Bee," said Peggy. "No, I don't know where they were going, Mr. Kelsey, nor when they'll come back."

"I see," nodded Cates. "Well, would you mind telling Hartley that William Cates, of the Wells-Fargo, is in Pinnacle City and is anxious to see him?"

"Why, certainly I'll tell him," replied Peggy. "Do you know him?"

Cates smiled and shook his head.

"Only by reputation. I happened to mention his name to the sheriff and found that he was here at your ranch. He will find me at the Pinnacle Hotel."

They rode back to the gate, where Ralston told Kelsey he was going out to the Circle M.

"I've got a pair of boots out there," explained Ralston. "And if I don't get 'em pretty soon, somebody'll be wearin' 'em."

Ralston spurred away, while Kelsey and Cates rode back to Pinnacle City.

IN THE meantime Hashknife, Sleepy and Honey were riding through the hills south of the HJ. Hashknife rode a tall roan horse and Jim Wheeler's saddle and Sleepy bestrode a Roman-nosed buckskin and a saddle which had been purchased for Peggy.

Honey led them out on a high pinnacle where they could look over a great part of the Tumbling River range. To the southwest, about a mile away, was the Circle M ranch, half-hidden in a clump of green trees. To the northwest was the Lazy B, three miles away, which Honey was able to locate definitely by a gash in the hills. They

could follow the windings of Tumbling River for miles in each direction. To the east of them was the railroad, winding around through the hills.

They could see the ribbon of smoke from a passing train heading for Kelo. Far down on the wagon-road they could see a lone rider heading for the Circle M. It was Jack Ralston, going after his boots, though they didn't know it.

"Is it possible to ford the river near the HJ?" asked Hashknife, as they turned to ride back.

"The old ford is about two hundred yards below the bridge," said Honey. "There's an old sand-bar. Some of the old road may be washed out by this time, but I reckon yuh could get across all right."

"Don'tcha like to cross on bridges?" grinned Sleepy.

"Oh, sure. But sometimes I get finicky."

They swung down off the hills and struck the road, which they followed back to the HJ. Peggy came down to the corral and delivered Cates' message to Hashknife. The tall cowboy did not change expression, but leaned one elbow against the corral fence, as she told him about the coming of Kelsey, Ralston and Cates to see him.

"He didn't know you were here," she explained. "But he mentioned your name, and Mr. Kelsey told him where he could find you."

"I don't reckon I know Mr. Cates, Peggy."

"He said you didn't, but he wants to see you."

"Oh, yeah. Thank yuh very much, Peggy. How are yuh feelin'?"

"Better."

"That's great. I hope Wong Lee won't throw me out for the appetite I've got tonight."

Peggy laughed and assured him that Wong Lee loved people who had big appetites. Honey was a trifle curious about what Cates wanted.

"Said he was a Wells-Fargo man, eh? Prob'ly a detective."

"Prob'ly," said Hashknife dryly, hanging up his saddle.

"Just about how in —— did he happen to mention you?" wondered Sleepy.

Hashknife did not reply, but Sleepy knew that he was just a trifle curious himself. But both of them realized that they had figured in deals which affected the Wells-Fargo, and it would not be at all strange if an express company investigator had heard of them.

But they did not go to Pinnacle City that night. Hashknife did not seem at all interested in finding Mr. Cates, and Sleepy knew Hashknife too well to insist that they go to town. But Cates was not to be denied a chance to talk with Hashknife. He and Kelsey drove out to the HJ early the following morning and found everybody at breakfast.

Hashknife left the table and met them at the porch. Kelsey introduced them, and Cates lost no time in telling Hashknife who he was and why he was in the Tumbling River country.

"But I can't do any good here, Hartley. I was talking with the sheriff about the case, and I told him it was a deal that required a man like you. I hadn't the slightest idea that you were here in the country. Yes, we've heard a lot about you and your ability. I am sure the company will pay you well for your services, and all I have to do is to send a wire."

"But there ain't nothin' to it, except catchin' Joe Rich," said Hashknife. "I don't know this country, Cates. When the sheriff's office, bein' familiar with the country, can't get him, what chance would a stranger have? Anyway, I'm not a man-hunter, Cates."

"No?" Cates lifted his eyebrows slightly. "Perhaps some of the stories I've heard were not true."

"They hardly ever are," seriously. "No, you've got me wrong, Cates. Never in my life did I go out and get a man who was wanted by the law—never took a man with a price on his head. That's a job for a sheriff or a policeman."

"Well, maybe that's true, Hartley. There's a nice reward for Joe Rich. Means about thirty-five hundred dollars."

"I don't want it," said Hashknife flatly.

"Don't want it?" Cates laughed huskily. "You're a queer bird, Hartley. Ain't you interested in putting criminals behind the bars?"

"Not a —— bit. Don't believe in the 'eye for an eye' theory. Never put a man behind the bars that I didn't wish it hadn't happened."

"Do yuh mean to say that you never collected a reward?" asked Kelsey.

"Never."

Kelsey laughed shortly.

"You must be pretty —— rich to turn down good money. Cates has told me that you and yore pardner have cleaned up a lot of bad-man outfits, and there's usually a reward for a bad man."

"Unless he hides his light under a bushel, Kelsey."

"Uh-huh. Well, Joe Rich don't hide his, that's a cinch."

Hashknife grinned widely.

"You've got to admire him, just the same. He's operatin' in his own country, and he ain't tryin' to disguise himself a whole lot. And it looks to me as though he's makin' a monkey out of yore office."

"What do yuh mean, Hartley?"

"By stayin' around here. It don't look to me as though he was scared of yuh, Kelsey."

"I see what yuh mean."

"Well, can't I induce you to work with us, Hartley?" asked Cates. "I can put you on the pay-roll in thirty minutes after I get back to town. I tell you, I'm helpless; and the sheriff admits that he can't do anything."

Hashknife shook his head slowly.

"No-o-o, I'm not interested, Cates. As I said before, it's just a case of goin' out and gettin' a man who knows every blade of grass in this country by its first name. What the sheriff ought to do is to make up a posse and comb this whole country. He must be hidin' in the valley."

"Fine chance!" snorted Kelsey. "In the first place I'd have a hard time gettin' any men. Joe is too popular. And in the second place, with all the friends Joe's got—well, figure it out for yourself."

"Do yuh think somebody is hidin' him, Kelsey?"

"I won't say that, but it could happen."

"Yeah, I think so," nodded Hashknife.

"Well, then you don't care to come in on the deal, eh?" queried Cates.

"Nope. Oh, I'm much obliged to yuh and all that, but it's out of my line, Cates. I wish yuh luck."

Cates laughed sourly.

"I'll need it, Hartley."

They shook hands with Hashknife and went back to their buggy. Hashknife watched them ride away and turned to see Sleepy and Honey standing in the doorway.

"We snuck out and listened," said Honey truthfully.

Hashknife smiled at them and rolled a cigaret.

"It kinda looks to me as though the law is stuck," observed Honey.

"It is," smiled Hashknife.

He scratched a match on the steps, lighted his cigaret and turned to Honey.

"Honey, who is there in this country that likes Joe Rich and didn't like Jim Wheeler?"

Honey scratched his elbow on his hip and blinked.

"Never heard of anythin' like that," he said. "Everybody liked Jim, and everybody liked Joe. What'sa idea, Hashknife?"

"Just curiosity. Everybody knows that Joe Rich stole that five thousand from Jim Wheeler, and the sheriff thinks somebody is hidin' Joe."

"I see yore idea. He thinks Joe is bein' taken care of by somebody, eh?"

"That's the only solution, Honey. He's got to eat and have a place to hide out. It must be somebody that likes Joe too well to turn him in for the reward—somebody that don't care about the loss of the HJ."

"By golly, that's right! But who could it be?"

"That's it," grumbled Sleepy.

"Well, he could 'a' made out long enough to have robbed the train," said Honey. "He's prob'ly high-tailin' it out of the country right now. It looks to me as though he's about twenty-five thousand dollars ahead of the game, and a man's a —— fool who never knows when he's got enough."

"Easy money," said Hashknife thoughtfully. "No man ever quits takin' easy money."

"Yuh don't think he'll try it again, do yuh?" asked Honey.

"From my point of view—yeah, I think he will, Honey."

Honey snorted and threw away his cigaret.

"I'll betcha he's pullin' away from here awful fast. Joe ain't no fool. I'll bet he knows when he's had enough."

"Might be," said Hashknife. "But I doubt it. Suppose we ride over to town and have a look around."

Sleepy and Honey were more than willing. They told the girls they would be back for supper. Peggy drew Hashknife aside and wanted to know what the sheriff had in mind. Hashknife told her frankly that Cates was a detective, and wanted him to help find Joe Rich.

"Just why did he want you to help?" she asked.

"Well, yuh see, it's like this," lied Hashknife. "Kelsey's got the idea that folks around here are too friendly with Joe to hunt him. Me and Sleepy, bein' strangers to Joe, might not be so particular."

"Oh, I see. And are you going to help him?"

"No-o-o-o—I'm goin' to help us find him, Peggy."

"But what good will that do?"

"Any 'good' is better than we've got, Peggy."

"I suppose it is," she sighed. "But I can't see where it will help anybody. If the law gets him—"

"Mebbe—and mebbe not."

"What do you mean, Hashknife?"

"I was just thinkin' out loud, Peggy. Yuh quit worryin' about things." He patted her on the arm. "We'll be back for supper, and I'll want to see yuh grinnin'."

Hashknife went out to his horse, which was the one Jim Wheeler had ridden the day he was killed. Hashknife noticed that the animal was a trifle sore-footed; so he examined its hoofs and found that it wore no shoes.

He pulled the saddle off and put it on a chunky bay, turning the sore-footed one back in the corral. The bay was shod in front.

"Jim said somethin' about' goin' to have that bronc shod," said Honey. "I remember him speakin' about it a week before he was killed."

"I hate to see a horse limp," said Hashknife. "I'd a lot rather walk."

They rode to Pinnacle City and Hashknife left Sleepy and Honey at the Pinnacle Saloon, where several more cowboys were arguing at the bar. After inquiring at the store, Hashknife found old Doctor Curzon's office.

The old doctor was not busy. He considered Hashknife gravely when Hashknife asked him about the death of Jim Wheeler.

"Well, just what did you wish to know?" he asked.

"All about it," smiled Hashknife. "They tell me Jim Wheeler died from concussion of the brain."

"You might call it that. His skull was crushed. Wonder he lived at all."

"And they tell me that his skull was crushed by the rocks."

"No doubt of it. I don't believe you told me your name."

"Hartley. I'm out at the HJ ranch—Jim Wheeler's place."

"Oh, yes. No, I don't think there is any doubt of Wheeler's head having been crushed by the rocks. You know how a body would bound, fastened by one foot to a stirrup."

"The rocks cut kinda deep, didn't they, Doc?"

"Mm-m-m-m—well, yes."

"Do yuh know—it's a funny thing, Doc?"

"What is?"

"The fact that there ain't a —— rock as big as a pea on that whole stretch of road where Wheeler was dragged."

"You say there isn't?"

"Well," smiled Hashknife, "I said 'there ain't'. It amounts to the same thing, I suppose. Your English is better than mine."

"But there must be rocks along there," insisted the doctor. "Every one seemed to take it for granted that—"

"That's the trouble, Doc—takin' it for granted. I looked it over the day after the rain, when the dust was settled; and it's as smooth as a billiard-table; not even a humpy spot on the road or along it. Go out and see for yourself."

"Well, well! No, I'll take your word for it. You don't look like a person who would lie about it. You have very good eyes, my friend."

"Thanks," smiled Hashknife.

"But to get back to Jim Wheeler. I believe it was Joe Rich who discovered him first after the accident. They tell queer tales about Joe Rich. I knew him."

"Like him?"

"Very much. He—I believe he said that the foot was still in the stirrup."

"This wound on the head," said Hashknife. "Just where was it the worst, Doc?"

"Nearly on the crown. In fact it extended from just above the left ear to the top of the head. Of course, it is easily possible for the horse to have struck him with a sharp-shod hoof."

"On top of the head, Doc?"

"Well, barely possible. Come to think of it, the wound did have that appearance; as though a horseshoe might have crushed the skull."

"His horse wasn't shod, Doc."

"It wasn't shod?"

The old doctor ran his hand through his white hair and squinted gravely.

"Hadn't been for weeks, said Hashknife."

"You are a detective?" asked the doctor quickly.

Hashknife smiled and shook his head.

"No, Doc; just curious."

"Mm-m-m-m-m," the doctor studied the ceiling of his office. "No rocks, no shoes. But the man had been dragged, Hartley. The skin showed evidence of that, and his shirt was rubbed through. More than that, his leg had been broken from a twist, and the pull of the stirrup."

"Look at it this way," suggested Hashknife. "Suppose Jim Wheeler met a man, who stopped him. This man strikes Wheeler over the head with a gun, knocking him off the saddle. Then this man robs him. Perhaps this man hooked one of Wheeler's feet in the stirrup, struck the horse and let it run away. Or, again, the foot might have hung in the stirrup when the man fell from the horse. Wouldn't it look as though it had been an accident?"

"No doubt of it, my friend. And in that case, it would appear that Joe Rich had not only robbed Jim Wheeler, but had murdered him as well."

"There's a lot of ways to look at it, Doc," smiled Hashknife, as he shook hands with the doctor. "I'm sure much obliged to yuh for yore help in this matter. Yuh would be doin' me another favor, if yuh don't tell anybody what we talked about."

"The ethics of my profession preclude such a thing."

"Well, thanks just the same, Doc. So long."

Hashknife went back to the Pinnacle, where he found Honey and Sleepy buying drinks for the Heavenly Triplets, the three boys from the Flying H. They tried to get Hashknife to join them, but he was in no mood to join their festivities. After telling Sleepy he was going back to the ranch, he mounted and rode out of town.

Hashknife was satisfied after his talk with the doctor, that Jim Wheeler had not died through an accident. That Joe Rich should have found Wheeler dragged to unconsciousness and have robbed him was too much for Hashknife to believe. Rich had been knocked down by Wheeler, and Hashknife, not knowing Rich, would not have any idea of Rich's nature.

As Hashknife neared the spot where Wheeler had been found he saw two saddled horses standing near the road. He drew rein and rode slowly along, wondering where the riders might be. Then he saw them about fifty feet off the road, looking around in some weeds and low brush.

They were Len Kelsey and Jack Ralston. They did not see Hashknife until he was almost up to their horses. Then they left off their search and came over to him.

"Howdy, gents," grinned Hashknife.

Kelsey showed a slight embarrassment but nodded pleasantly.

"Just lookin' around," he said, as if his actions demanded an explanation. "This is where they found Jim Wheeler, yuh know."

"That's what they tell me. I reckon the rain wiped out any tracks yuh might expect to find."

"Yeah, it did," said Ralston quickly. "We found that out."

"No sign of Joe Rich, eh?"

"Not a —— sign!" snapped Kelsey, swinging into his saddle.

"I reckon he's a pretty smart lad," said Hashknife. "What became of the detective?"

"He's in town," said Kelsey. "You should have taken him up on that deal, Hartley. Made good wages out of it, even if yuh couldn't find Joe Rich."

"No-o-o-o, I didn't want the job. Joe's got too many good friends around here, Kelsey; and I might stop a bullet, if I knew too much."

"There's a —— of a lot of truth in that, Hartley."

"Sure," grinned Hashknife. "I'm no fool."

"Playin' safe, eh?" said Ralston. "Well, I don't blame yuh. When a feller's a stranger, he can't be too careful."

"I'll watch my own hide," declared Hashknife. "I dunno where that feller, Cates, heard all that stuff about me. He must 'a' got me mixed with somebody else. Anyway, he's all wrong if he thinks I'm huntin' rewards."

"Well," laughed Kelsey, "he told me he didn't believe half he had heard about yuh."

"I'm shore glad about that," said Hashknife simply. "Well, I've got to be movin' along, gents. Good huntin' to yuh."

Hashknife rode on toward the ranch, while Kelsey and his deputy went on to Pinnacle City. Kelsey swore softly at sight

of the Heavenly Triplets' horses at the Pinnacle rack.

"There's two HJ broncs there, too," observed Ralston. "That means Honey Bee and Stevens. I don't reckon we'll have much to do with the Pinnacle as long as they're holdin' forth."

And they were surely holding forth. Sleepy and Honey still had a little money, and the boys from the Flying H were spending their next month's wages. William H. Cates, the detective, had fallen into their toils and was enjoying it.

Also, Mr. Cates was marveling at the amount of raw liquor they could consume without showing it. Mr. Cates was rather proud of his own ability, but he was beginning to have a hunch that before long he was going to see a lot more men than were actually in the room.

"Thish is lots of fun," he announced.

"Par'ner, you ain't started," declared Lonnie. "You stay with us and we'll show yuh bush'ls 'f di'monds. Oh, yessir, you'll shee lots of 'm. We'll show yuh levity, y'betcha."

Supper time came but none of them was hungry. Darkness came down upon Pinnacle City, and still those six men leaned on the bar, their toasts becoming more and more elaborate. Then Lonnie leaned his forehead against the bar and wept bitterly.

"Thish is all there ish," he announced. "Nothin' t' do. Spen' all day gettin' drunk, and there's nothin' t' do but go home."

"O-o-o-oh, my!" wailed Nebrasky. "Tha's a fac'. The jigger that wrote 'Home, Sweet Home' must 'a' never got out. Wha's to be done, I'd crave to get an answer? No entertainment? Can't you think of anythin', Misser Detective?"

Not so Cates. He clung to the bar with both hands.

"Let's all go out to the ranch," suggested Nebrasky.

"Wha' for?" queried Honey. "Uncle Hozie'd hop our necks."

"Le's go for ride," choked Cates. "Need —uk—air."

"That," said Sleepy owlishly, "is a shuggestion."

"I know!" exploded Lonnie. "C'mere."

They followed him outside, much to the relief of the bartender, and Lonnie unfolded his scheme. There were many drawbacks, but each and every one was overcome.

With great difficulty Lonnie Myers and Dan Leach secured their horses at the hitch-rack, and they all weaved their erratic way down to the Pinnacle livery-stable, where they circled to the rear. A shed with a long sloping roof had been added to the stable at some remote time, and within this stable was the hearse.

The door was merely fastened with a hasp. They rolled the old hearse out into the yard and tied two lariat ropes to the end of the tongue. The ancient equipage of the dead was resplendent in a fresh coat of varnish and the four horsetail plumes waved boldly from the corners of the top.

They put Cates inside, because he was unable to climb to the top, while Honey Bee, Sleepy and Nebrasky crowded together on the narrow seat. It was quite a task to get both horses pulling at the same time, but once they got the old hearse rolling it was no trick to keep it rolling.

Around they went into the main street, gaining momentum each moment; so much momentum, in fact, that the horses took notice of things and seemed to desire more distance between themselves and this creaking equipage with the yelping cowboys and flowing plumes.

Lonnie's mount was traveling one side of the street, while Dan's mount seemed to prefer the opposite sidewalk, while the hearse took a fairly straight route up the middle of the street, until almost opposite the Pinnacle City bank. Then Lonnie's horse got tangled up in a hitch-rack and Dan's whirled and started the opposite direction.

Crash! The front wheels of the hearse jack-knifed and struck the sidewalk.

Crash! The end of the swinging tongue took out one of the front windows of the bank, while the hearse lurched to a standstill with the front wheels against the front of the bank building.

Sleepy was thrown off the seat when the wheels struck the sidewalk and he landed on his hands and knees in the street. The sound of the wreck was audible for quite a distance, and in a few minutes the hearse was surrounded by a curious crowd. There was hardly enough light to see what had happened.

Sleepy staggered across the street and sat down on the sidewalk, feeling very foolish over the whole thing. A horseman rode past him and stopped at the hitch-rack. It was Lonnie Myers. Sleepy went over to him.

"That —— thing headed into the bank," he told Lonnie.

"My ——! It did? Whatcha know about that? Where's the rest of the gang?"

"Let's go over and have a look."

No one in the crowd seemed to know who had done it. Kelsey was there, as was Jack Ralston.

"Somebody got pretty —— smart, it seems to me," growled Kelsey.

"Hey, Kelsey!" yelled a voice, "there's a body inside the hearse."

"My ——, it's Cates!" whispered Lonnie. "Let's get away from here before we all get arrested."

They hurried back to the Pinnacle bar where they found Dan Leach and Nebrasky. Nebrasky had a lot of skin off his long nose and Dan limped in one leg. None of them mentioned what had just taken place. They had a drink, after which Lonnie leaned on the bar and wondered where Honey might be.

"The last time I seen him he was goin' toward the bank," said Sleepy dryly. "Prob'ly wanted to borrow some money."

Jack Ralston came in and looked the boys over, but did not say anything. Perhaps he had a fair idea as to who had taken the hearse, but he had no evidence. Apparently these boys were merely having a friendly drink.

"Have any of you gents seen that feller Cates?" he asked.

"Cates?" Lonnie screwed up his eyes. "Oh, yeah—the detective! Why, I think he died, didn't he?" Lonnie turned to Nebrasky.

"Oh, yeah—Cates. Believe he did, Lonnie."

"Uh-huh," Lonnie turned to Ralston. "Yeah, he died. Have a drink, Jack?"

"Nope."

Ralston turned on his heel and went out.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" laughed Nebrasky. "Wait'll they find him."

"They found him," said Sleepy. "We'll probably have to pay for that busted window."

"But wasn't it worth it?" chuckled Nebrasky. "My ——, I never went higher in my life. There goes the hearse."

They walked to the door and saw several men pulling the hearse back to its shed. They could see a crowd in front of the bank, and apparently there was a man on a ladder, nailing boards over the broken window.

"Where in —— is Honey?" asked Sleepy. "By golly, we're shy one man!"

"That's right. Let's go find him."

They wended their way to the Arapaho saloon, but did not find him there, and then they made a systematic search of every place they could think of.

They finally came back past the bank, where they found the object of their search sitting on the sidewalk, holding his head in his hands. Lonnie almost fell over him in the dark.

"Now, where in —— have you been keepin' youself?" demanded Lonnie. "We've been lookin' for yuh for about a week."

This was hardly true, because the accident had not happened more than twenty minutes previous.

Honey lifted his head and wiggled his arms.

"I'm all right, I reckon," he said huskily. "Didn't any of you ord'nary drunks see me go into the bank?"

"See yuh go into the bank?" grunted Nebrasky.

"Abs'lutely! Right through the window! I landed on my chin right in front of the deposit window with one of them horsetail plumes in my right hand."

"And didn't get killed?" wondered Nebrasky.

"Oh, ——, I got killed all right, as far as that's concerned. Oh, my! I heard a lot of folks talkin' about the busted window, while I'm crawlin' around on my hands and knees, tryin' to find a way out.

"And then I got the scare of my life," Honey laughed foolishly. "I found a man in there."

"Yuh found a man in there?" queried Sleepy quickly.

"Uh-huh. Honest Injun, cross m' heart. He's there yet, too, By golly, it scared me so much that I got right up and walked out the back door. Funniest feelin' yuh—"

"Hold on a minute!" snorted Sleepy. "You walked out the back door, Honey?"

"Shore did, Sleepy."

"Was it unlocked?"

"Must 'a' been—I jist turned the knob. I was on my hands and knees, kinda crawlin' and feelin' along, when I got hold of somethin' that feels a lot like a man's legs. I keeps on feelin', and I keeps on a-risin', until my hands touch his face, and then I hightailed it outside. I fell down over a box and bumped my head against the building, but

kept on goin'. I reckon I plumb circled this side of the street, and just came back here a little while ago."

"Yo're drunk," declared Nebrasky.

"I was drunk," corrected Honey. "But by golly, I was sober a-plenty when I felt that jigger."

"Is he there yet?" asked Lonnie.

"——, I tell yuh he's roped to the chair!"

"Wait a minute," said Sleepy. "You boys go over to the Pinnacle and let me handle this, will yuh?"

"Go to it," said Lonnie. "C'mon, you fellers."

Sleepy went down the street to the sheriff's office. He was perfectly sober and none the worse for their escapade, except for a slightly skinned knee. Both Kelsey and Ralston were at the office when Sleepy came in.

"Yuh better investigate the bank," said Sleepy. "I just came past there, and I thought I heard a man groanin'."

"Yeah?" Kelsey grinned knowingly. "Yuh did, eh? Just what kind of a game are you punchers tryin' to pull off now?"

"Oh, well, go ahead and be a —— fool," sighed Sleepy, turning back to the door. "I'm tellin' yuh what I heard, tha'sall."

But Kelsey stopped him at the door.

"Yuh think yuh heard a man groanin', eh?"

"It don't make any difference," said Sleepy. "Go on to bed. I'll find the man that owns the bank, and he'll probably be interested."

"If this is a joke—" warned Kelsey picking up his hat.

"I better go and get Warner, the cashier," said Ralston. "He rooms at MacRae's place."

Ralston trotted down the street while Kelsey followed Sleepy back to the front of the bank. They listened at the broken window, which had been barred with some planks, but could hear nothing.

"Yuh probably heard the wind blowing," said Kelsey.

"What wind?" asked Sleepy.

Kelsey didn't explain just which wind he had meant, as there was not a breath of air stirring. In a few minutes Ralston joined them, panting from his run.

"Warner ain't been there since supper, Len. He was workin' tonight, they said."

"And Old Man Ludlow, the president, is on a trip to the coast," said Len. "How in —— are we goin' to find out anythin'?"

"Smash out another window," suggested Ralston.

"How about the back door?" asked Sleepy.

They went around to the back and found the door sagging open. Kelsey swore softly and led the way inside, where they lighted matches to guide them. And they found just what Honey Bee had found—a man roped to a chair and gagged. It was Warner, the cashier, his eyes blinking foolishly at the light of Kelsey's match, while Ralston took a pocket-knife and severed the lariat rope which bound him.

Warner was apparently unhurt. After they untied the gag he worked his jaw painfully, rubbed his lips and managed to get back a measure of his speech.

Sleepy found a lamp, which he lighted, and the three men watched the cashier stretch his arms and legs, grimacing as the returning circulation pained him.

"You better send a wire to Old Man Ludlow," he said huskily. "Palace Hotel, San Francisco. The bank has been cleaned out."

"Cleaned out, Warner?" asked Kelsey.

"Look at the vault door."

It was wide open. The sheriff did not investigate. Sleepy stepped over and peered inside. It was an old-fashioned vault with the ordinary combination. Time locks had not come to Pinnacle City yet.

"How many in the gang?" asked Kelsey.

"One," Warner spat painfully and rubbed his lips. "One man, Sheriff. I was working tonight. I used the back door. When I unlocked it and stepped outside, this man confronted me with a gun and forced me back inside.

"I refused to open the vault—at first. But he produced some dynamite and told me was going to blow it open. He said he would tie me close enough to see it bust. There wasn't anything for me to do except to open it. Then he roped me to a chair, put a gag in my mouth and helped himself. There was enough light through that side window for me to see that he put everything in a sack."

"Masked?" asked Kelsey.

"Yes. I wish one of you would wire Ludlow. What was that crash that broke the front window?"

"Some drunken cowboys," growled Kelsey. "How long before that did the robbery take place?"

"Possibly fifteen minutes. Might have been longer. But there was another man in here after that crash. I couldn't see what he looked like, but he felt all over me, and then I heard him go out through the back door."

Kelsey squinted closely at Sleepy, but Sleepy looked very innocent. His blue eyes did not waver for an instant.

"Pretty —— queer!" snorted Kelsey.

"Ain't it?" agreed Sleepy. "Queerest thing I ever heard."

"It might have been the man who tied me up," said Warner.

Warner was a small, thin-faced man, slightly stooped, wearing steel-bowed glasses. He took them from his pocket and hooked the bows over his ears, his hands trembling.

"Might have been," agreed Sleepy. "Prob'ly took him quite a while to clean out the place. How much did he get?"

"I can't tell you that, sir. I think Mr. Ludlow would like to hear about it as soon as possible."

"No hurry; he can't help any," said Kelsey. "Warner, did you get a good look at this robber?"

"It was dark in here. He held a match in his left hand while I worked the combination."

"Did, eh?" Kelsey seemed interested. "Well, how much of him didja see, Warner?"

"Not much, I'm afraid; only that arm in the light. You see, he stood rather behind me."

"All right; and didja see that arm well enough to tell what it looked like?"

"Yes, I saw it well enough, I think. It—it looked like a—a—well, just like an arm," he finished weakly.

"That's fine," sneered Kelsey. "All we've got to do is to find a man who has a left arm that looks like an arm. Didn't yuh see his clothes, his hands, his gun?"

"Yes, I—I saw his gun. Certainly I saw his gun."

"Was it like this one?" Kelsey jerked out his Colt and held it in front of Warner.

"No, not exactly. I think it had a white handle."

"Ah-hah! Now, about his sleeve, Warner. Did he wear leather cuffs?"

"Yes, yes! I forgot them. Black, I think. Perhaps they merely looked black. But the matchlight—there were silver ornaments, Sheriff. I remember now—silver stars. It's funny I didn't remember before."

"Uh-huh. We'll go and send that wire to Ludlow, Warner. Lock that back door, will yuh, Warner. Not much use, at that; nothin' left to steal. Mebbe yuh better shut that vault door and spin the combination."

Warner went with the sheriff and deputy, while Sleepy cut across the street and found the rest of the boys in front of the Pinnacle. From there they could see the light in the bank, and they were burning with curiosity.

"Forget what you know, Honey," warned Sleepy. "The rest of yuh don't know a thing; *sabe?* The bank was cleaned out by a lone bandit fifteen minutes ahead of our smash. The man Honey found was Warner, the cashier. He was roped and gagged, but he wasn't knocked out."

"F'r ——'s sake!" snorted Honey. "That was it, eh?"

"Yeah, and we better all head for home," advised Sleepy. "We don't know a thing. The bank is as clean as a hound's tooth and the man who cleaned it out wore silver stars on his cuffs and used a white-handled gun. Let's mosey."

They all got their horses and headed out of town, the Heavenly Triplets going to the Flying H, while Honey and Sleepy rode swiftly out to the HJ where they woke Hashknife in the bunk-house and told him their story. He sat up in bed and smoked a cigaret, his lean fingers scratching at his unruly hair.

"It looks to me as though Joe Rich missed his callin' when he got himself elected sheriff," he said slowly. "That boy shore is featherin' his nest. And yuh had Mr. Cates laid out in the hearse, eh?"

"Fit to be buried," nodded Sleepy. "I reckon he was the only one that didn't do a high dive. That little cashier shore was scared. The robber told him he'd either open the safe or get a front seat at the explosion. And he held a match while the cashier worked the combination. By golly, it's so easy to do a thing like that, that I wonder why men work for a dollar a day! It's shore easy money."

"Easy to get, uneasy to keep, Sleepy."

"Yea-a-a-ah! Who in —— is goin' to get it away from him? You can preach honesty to me all yuh want to, cowboy, but when I see a job done as easy as that one—"

"Aw, c'mon to bed, and stop yappin'. I want to think."

CHAPTER VIII

CLUES

NOTHING had ever happened in Pinnacle City that caused as much excitement as the robbery of the bank. It was something that affected nearly everybody in the Tumbling River country. As Uncle Hozie expressed it—

"There's a lot of —— flat pocketbooks right now."

The news spread swiftly, and by noon of the following day the town was filled with range-folk. The sheriff came in for the usual amount of criticism, and a number of the cattlemen sat in his office, trying to help him devise ways and means of putting a stop to Joe Rich's activities. A wire had been received from Old Man Ludlow, the president of the bank, who was on his way back to Pinnacle.

Uncle Hozie mourned the loss of eight thousand dollars, while Ed Merrick swore himself red in the face over half that amount. He had drawn out five thousand to lend to Jim Wheeler, thus cutting down his bank deposit.

But they were all losers; some of them more so than others, and Joe Rich's latest robbery bid fair to make times rather hard in Tumbling River. It was a privately owned bank, and they knew that Ludlow could not make good their losses.

William H. Cates took the first train out of town. The sheriff had hauled him out of the hearse and put him to bed. The following morning he was filled with remorse over it all, but strangely enough he was unable to tell just whom he had been with. He told the sheriff to do his little best and boarded a train for the north.

An examination of the vault disclosed the fact that the robber had taken every cent of money, but had not bothered with any papers. Warner refused even to make a guess at how much money was in the vault, but admitted that it was more than was usually carried. The bank remained closed.

Hashknife, Sleepy and Honey came back to town that forenoon, but the Heavenly Triplets did not show up. Merrick talked with Hashknife about the robbery. Hashknife was not interested to any great extent.

A little later on Hashknife was talking with Kelsey, when the depot agent came to Kelsey.

"Here's a funny thing," said the agent. "Remember the night the bridge caught fire?"

"Sure," nodded Kelsey. "What about it?"

"That night," resumed the agent, "the rear brakeman of the cattle-train went back to flag the passenger, and he's never been seen since."

"What do yuh mean?" Kelsey was evidently puzzled.

"Just what I said. I don't know how he was passed up. The train was held here quite a while, but the storm was bad, and nobody needed him, I suppose. Down at the bridge both trains were stalled quite a while, and there was no need of whistling in the flag from the cattle-train.

"Oh, the company missed him the next day. But he was what is known as a boomer brakeman, and they just thought he had stepped out without drawing his pay. They do that once in a while—those boomers. But later on they got to checking up on things, and the conductor remembered that he hadn't seen this man since the night at the bridge. Ransome is the division point, you see; so he didn't have much farther to go. The reason they watered that stock here was because there were better facilities than at Ransome."

"Well, that's kinda queer," said Kelsey.

"I saw him go out to flag," said Hashknife. "I remember that freight conductor blamed the passenger crew for runnin' past the flag. They said they never seen it."

"Well, what do you suppose happened to him?" queried Kelsey.

"Search me," said the depot agent. "All I know is what I heard over the wire."

Hashknife left the sheriff and found Sleepy and Honey. He told them what the depot agent had said. A few minutes later they were heading for the railroad bridge, going through the country where Hashknife and Sleepy had walked the night of the bridge-fire. They tied their horses to the right-of-way fence, crawled through and climbed up to the track level.

The railroad had been graded along the side of the hill, so that the opposite side dropped off about twenty or thirty feet, where the brush grew thick along the fence. Hashknife estimated where the rear end of the cattle-train would have been, and they

walked back along the track to the first curve.

Just beyond that there was considerable seepage of water on the lower side, where grew a profusion of tules and cattails, mingled with wild-roses and willows. The bank was rather abrupt along here and heavy brush grew between the track and the upper fence.

Hashknife slid cautiously down this bank, hooking his heels into the broken rock. There was more water, covered with a greenish slime.

"Hook yore heels, cowboy," laughed Sleepy. "One little mistake, and you take a green-water bath."

Hashknife worked down to the water edge and went slowly along about fifty feet. Then he stopped and sat back against the bank. For several moments he studied the tangle of brush and green water. Then he turned his head and looked up at the two men above him.

"I've found him," he said.

"You've found him?" gasped Honey.

"Uh-huh. One foot still on dry land. I thought it was just an old shoe. He must 'a' went in head first. There's his lantern in the muck—just the bottom of it stickin' out."

Hashknife turned around and climbed up the bank. From the track level he could not see the shoe nor the lantern. He heaped up a pile of stones beside the track to mark the spot.

"Ain't we goin' to take him out?" asked Sleepy.

"Not me," replied Hashknife. "That's the sheriff's job."

They rode back to the ranch and were just debating what to do, when Ben Collins came along on his way to town from the Circle M. Honey called to him and he stopped at the HJ gate.

"You'll probably see Kelsey in town," said Honey. "Tell him we found the brakeman of that cattle-train. He's in the ditch on the west side of the railroad track, about three hundred yards south of the bridge. We heaped up a pile of rocks along the track, and the body is straight down from that. Tell Kelsey he'll need help to get the body."

Collins stared at Honey, his mouth agape. It was all Greek to him, it seemed.

"Well, I'll be ——!" he snorted. "Let me get this straight."

He repeated what Honey had told him, making a few mistakes, which Honey rectified.

"But who killed him?" he demanded.

"We don't know, Ben."

"Well, I'll be ——! All right, I'll tell him."

Ben spurred his horse to a gallop and was soon out of sight.

"They'll have to come through this way to get him, won't they?" asked Hashknife.

"Unless they want to carry the body across the railroad bridge. Good gosh, things look worse for Joe Rich every day! I suppose he ran into the brakeman, eh?"

"Probably," nodded Hashknife. "Of course he might have fell off the track that night. The wind was awful. If he struck his head on the rocks and slid into the water he'd die pretty quick. We'll have to wait until they take him out."

But they didn't have to wait long. Inside an hour Kelsey, Ralston, Ben Collins and Abe Liston, of the 3W3, rode in at the HJ. No one had told Peggy and Laura about the dead man, and their curiosity was aroused by the advent of the sheriff and his men.

"Man got hit by a train out by the bridge," said Hashknife.

"Was he killed?" asked Laura.

"I reckon he was."

Hashknife went out and talked with Kelsey, who seemed a trifle sore about their finding the body.

"I suppose yuh fooled around and wiped out all the clues," he said complainingly.

"Well, I dunno," smiled Hashknife. "We didn't go near the body, Sheriff."

"Didn't, eh? Seems to me you was in a —— of a sweat to get out there ahead of the law."

"Did look thataway." Hashknife did not cease smiling, with his mouth, although his eyes were serious.

"Just how do yuh figure this yore affair, Hartley?"

"You do the figurin'," suggested Hashknife.

The sheriff glanced keenly at Hashknife's eyes and decided to drop the subject.

"Oh, all right," he said. "Yuh might come along and help us take the body out."

"Yeah, I might," said Hashknife. "But I don't think I will. You've got plenty men with yuh."

"Uh-huh." Kelsey did not press the invitation, but rode away, followed by his three men.

Honey Bee grinned widely and did a shuffle in the dirt.

"That's tellin' 'em, cowboy. You've got Kelsey's goat. I could see it in his face."

"Let's go down to the bunk-house," suggested Hashknife. "Them darned girls ask too many questions. I reckon they suspect that this man was killed at that hold-up, and I don't want to worry Peggy any more. She takes it too serious. By golly, she acts as though folks blamed her for what Joe Rich has done."

"That's Peggy," sighed Honey. "Whitest little girl that ever lived. Suppose we have a three-handed game of seven-up for a million dollars a corner."

"You two go ahead," said Hashknife. "I've got to think a while."

"Don't yore head ever hurt yuh?" asked Honey. "You've done an awful lot of thinkin' since I knew yuh, Hashknife."

"He has to think an awful lot to get a little ways," grinned Sleepy.

Sleepy and Honey went into the bunk-house, and Laura wig-wagged to Hashknife from the veranda of the ranch-house.

"What about this dead man?" she demanded.

"Dunno yet, Laura. He's dead, but we don't know what killed him."

He told her about the missing brakeman. Laura had been doing a little thinking, and she confided to Hashknife that she was afraid that Jim Wheeler had been killed by the man who stole the money.

"Aunt Emma thinks so, too," she said. "We had a talk about it the other day. Joe was out here that day, you know. He came to tell Peggy good-by. His lips were cut badly and he looked awful bad. But Peggy didn't tell him good-by. She was crying and didn't hear him go away. She thought he was still there. We found out later that Uncle Jim had knocked Joe down on the street in Pinnacle City."

Hashknife nodded over this. He had heard it before.

"But she still loves Joe Rich."

"I honestly think she does," agreed Laura.

"Did yuh hear about them findin' Joe's pocket-knife in the express car?"

Laura hadn't heard about it.

"The knife that Peggy gave him for his birthday? Oh, what an awful thing to do! Criminals always make mistakes, don't they?"

"Yeah, they shore do, Laura—bad ones, too."

Peggy came out on the veranda and sat down with them.

"Tell me about that bank robbery," she said to Hashknife.

The tall cowboy sighed and reshaped the crown of his hat.

"There ain't much to tell, Peggy. A lone man met the cashier at the rear door of the bank, forced him back, made him open the vault and then roped and gagged the cashier. They say he got away with a lot of money. Wasn't anybody hurt."

"What was the description of that man, Hashknife?"

"Wasn't any—much. Yuh see, it was dark in there."

"Much?" sighed Peggy. "Oh, I know!" she suddenly blurted.

"You try to cover it. Please don't do that, Hashknife."

Hashknife shook his head sadly.

"That cashier was probably scared stiff, Peggy. Power of suggestion made him see what the express messenger saw—the black leather cuffs with the silver stars. Discount all that stuff. Keep smilin', I tell yuh. A-a-aw, shucks!"

Hashknife jumped to his feet and walked away. Peggy was crying, and Hashknife couldn't stand tears. He went down and sat against the stable, his hat pulled down over his eyes. And he was still there when the sheriff and his men came back, bringing the body of the brakeman, strapped across the saddle of Jack Ralston's horse, while Jack rode behind Kelsey. The body was covered with a dirty tarpaulin.

Hashknife went out to meet them, and Kelsey thanked him for the marker.

"It shore was well hidden," he said, "and them rocks helped a lot. I reckon this will kinda swell the reward for Joe Rich, Hartley. This man was shot. Yuh can even see the powder marks on his coat, so it must 'a' been close work. We'll shore ask for Joe Rich dead or alive now."

They rode on, and Hashknife leaned against the stable, his mind working swiftly. Dead or alive!

"Oh, I was afraid of that," he told himself.

He saddled his horse and went to the

bunk-house, where he called to the boys.

"I'm goin' to town," he told them. "They just went past with that body. The man was shot at close range, and they'll offer a reward for Joe Rich, dead or alive. I want to get a look at that body. Be back for supper, and for gosh sake, don't let Peggy know what they said!"

Hashknife galloped away from the ranch, but did not try to overtake the sheriff and his party. They took the body straight to the doctor's office. It happened that Doctor Curzon was the county coroner, and the case would require an inquest.

But the sheriff and his party did not stay more than fifteen minutes; so Hashknife waited until they were out of sight before he rode up to the doctor's little home.

The old doctor greeted him gravely and started to tell him about the latest tragedy, but Hashknife stopped him.

"I know all about it, Doc. What about that bullet? Did it go all the way through?"

The doctor nodded.

"Yes, it did."

Hashknife sighed. He had hopes that the caliber of the bullet might give him a clue. The doctor showed him the body. There was no mistaking the corpse. It was that of the brakeman, but little changed from immersion. The bullet had gone straight through his heart, and he had probably plunged straight off the high bank into the slough.

"Poor devil," sighed Hashknife. "Anyway, he died quick, Doc. The wind was blowin' away from us, so we had no chance to hear the sound of the shot. Anyway, I'm much obliged."

"You're certainly welcome, sir. We will probably hold an inquest tomorrow, and perhaps the sheriff will ask you to attend as a witness."

"All right, Doc."

Hashknife led his horse up to the main street and over to the Pinnacle hitch-rack. Just beyond the hitch-rack was the end of the board sidewalk which led down past the saloon. This end of the sidewalk was about two feet higher than the ground level. It had been intended to continue the walk, but this had never been done. Pedestrians usually ignored the sidewalk at this point and went farther along, where the contour of the ground permitted a lower step.

Hashknife sat down on the end of this sidewalk, bracing his shoulders against the corner of the building, and rolled a smoke. The sheriff was at his office, talking with the depot agent, who was writing a telegram to send to the railroad company at Ransome.

Ben Collins' and Abe Liston's horses were at the Pinnacle hitch-rack; so Hashknife surmised that they were retailing the story in the saloon. Two youngsters came from the rear of the building, barefooted, overalls-clad. One of them had a ball made of rags sewed through with heavy thread; rather a lop-sided affair, but a ball, for all that.

Hashknife smiled at them and they grinned back at him.

"Throw me a catch," he said, holding out his hands.

The boy with the ball flipped it toward Hashknife, but his aim was faulty and the ball struck the ground several feet in front of Hashknife. It failed to bounce, but rolled heavily under the sidewalk.

"Bum throwin'!" shrilled the other youngster.

Hashknife laughed and dropped to his knees, crawling beneath the sidewalk trying to reach the ball.

"Lemme help yuh, mister," said the boy who owned the ball.

"I can get it," said Hashknife.

He picked it up and handed it absently back to the boy. In the accumulated litter of old playing-cards, miscellaneous pieces of paper and the general débris, his eyes caught sight of a certain piece of paper.

"Can'tcha git out?" asked the boy who had the ball.

Hashknife backed out. He had forgotten the boys. In his hand was a folded piece of paper, which he unfolded and read carefully. It was Jim Wheeler's copy of the note on which he had borrowed the money from Ed Merrick.

"Now, how in —— did that get under there?" wondered Hashknife. He studied the situation. Close to this spot was the hitch-rack.

"He got on his horse at that rack," said Hashknife to himself. "He thought he put the note in his pocket, but didn't; and the wind blew it under the sidewalk. No wonder he didn't have the note when they found him."

He folded the note and put it carefully in his pocket. The two youngsters were watching him closely, possibly wondering what he had found. Hashknife stared at

them for a moment, and a grin came to his lips as he dug down in his pocket and drew out two quarters.

"You boys buy yoreselves some candy," he said, giving them the money.

"Thank yuh, mister!" exploded one of them, and they raced across the street to a store, all out of breath. Hashknife went to his horse, mounted and rode out of town.

The two boys lined up at the fly-specked candy counter and took plenty of time in picking out what they wanted. Angus McLaren and Len Kelsey came into the store, talking earnestly about the latest developments, and stopped near the two boys.

The old man behind the counter peered over his glasses at the boys.

"Yuh want two-bits' worth apiece?" he asked, rather awed at their enormous purchases. "By golly, yuh must have struck a soap mine!"

"Didn't strike no mine," said one of them. "How much are them chaklits, Mr. Becker?"

"Aw, you don't want no chaklits!" snorted the other. "They don't give yuh hardly any for a dime. Gimme some mixed."

"I want some mixed, too, Mr. Becker, but I don't want all of it mixed."

One of the boys turned and saw the sheriff and McLaren, who were smiling at them.

"Got two-bits apiece," grinned the boy. "A tall cowpuncher gave it to us."

"He's that new puncher at the HJ," explained the other.

"Gave yuh each two-bits, eh?" smiled McLaren. "That was generous of him, eh?"

"Y'betcha. Over by the Pinnacle' Saloon rack. I throwed my ball to him an' it went under the end of the sidewalk. He got under after it, an' he found somethin', I think. Anyway, he was lookin' at a paper when he got out, an' he gave us each two-bits."

"What kind of a piece of paper?" asked McLaren.

"I seen it," said the other boy, watching the merchant weigh the candy. "It was kinda folded up—had printin' on it. Say, Mr. Becker, are yuh sure them scales don't weight under?"

They paid for their candy and went outside, looking into their sacks.

"That must have been Hartley," said Kelsey. "He didn't lose any time in follow'in' us to town. He was at the HJ, when we brought the body past there. I wonder what he found?"

McLaren shook his head. He hadn't any idea, nor was he interested in knowing.

Kelsey went back to the court-house, where he found Fred Coburn, the county attorney, at his office. He laid the facts of the case before Coburn, who listened to Kelsey's story of finding the body of the brakeman.

"All right," said Coburn briskly. "Make out a new reward notice, Len. Offer the reward, dead or alive. I'll file a charge of first degree murder against Rich. Personally, I think he killed Jim Wheeler, although that would be hard to make stick. This is a cinch. Better see if the commissioners don't want to boost that reward. When Ludlow comes, I'm sure the bank will boost it. Rich is going to make one break too many—and we'll get him."

"That's a cinch, Coburn. See yuh later."

As he came from the attorney's office he met Ed Merrick, Angus McLaren and Ross Layton, the three commissioners.

"I was just going to look for you fellers," he said. "Just had a talk with Coburn about the reward. He's goin' to file first degree murder against Joe Rich and wants me to make up a new reward notice, offering it for him, dead or alive. How about boostin' the ante, eh?"

McLaren shook his head quickly.

"I'm not in favor of it. There's already thirty-five hundred offered, and I've no doubt the railroad company will add to that for the death of the brakeman."

"It would be worth a lot to have him behind the bars," said Merrick seriously.

"Or under the sod," added Layton.

"Let's boost it another thousand," suggested Merrick. "It won't hurt to make it worth while."

McLaren turned to Layton.

"What do ye say, Ross?"

"Oh, it's all right with me," said the little man, hooking his thumbs inside the armholes of his fancy vest. "Seems to me it's like making conversational bets—they're never won or lost. Personally, I'd like to see more action and less interest in what the man's scalp is worth."

"Ye hit it, Ross," laughed McLaren.

"Well," said Kelsey savagely, "in this country you've just about got to buy a man like Joe Rich."

"Ye mean to make it worth while for somebody to forget friendship, Kelsey?"

"That's just what I mean, McLaren!"

"Oh, well, have it yer own way, lad. Friendship is a great thing, and it's har-rd to overcome with silver. As much of a law-abidin' citizen as I am, I'd vote to hang the man that would even betray Joe Rich for money."

"You wouldn't stretch friendship to cover a man who was wanted for murder, would yuh, Mac?" asked Kelsey.

"Friendship," said McLaren heavily, "is ver-ry elastic. If it wasn't there's few of us that would have any."

"By ——, that's true!" snorted Layton. "I guess we'll just leave that reward as it is, Mac."

"All right, yo're the doctors," said Kelsey. "I merely wanted to speed things up a little."

Merrick smiled thinly.

"Joe Rich still has friends," he said meaningly.

McLaren's eyes darkened, but he turned and walked away, with the flowery-vested member from Ransome following in his wake, his black coat-tails flapping, looking very much as Honey Bee had said—"a bouquet of flowers wrapped up in crêpe."

Merrick and Ben Collins rode past the HJ a few hours later and stopped to tell Hashknife that Kelsey wanted him and the other two boys at the inquest on the following day.

"Just a matter of form," said Merrick. "You boys found the body, and I think you were the last persons to see him alive; so the coroner will require your testimony."

"Yeah; all right," agreed Hashknife. "What time?"

"About two o'clock in the afternoon."

Merrick's white teeth flashed in a smile beneath his pointed black mustache as he glanced toward the house, where Laura was standing, looking out toward them.

"Rather a pleasant place to stay, Hartley," he said meaningly.

Hashknife did not reply to this, but his gray eyes suddenly seemed to change color and became very hard. Merrick shifted his gaze and lifted his reins.

"Well, we'll be amblin' on," he said. "See yuh tomorrow."

Neither Merrick nor Collins said anything until they were well out of earshot, when Collins glanced back and said:

"Don't fool with that jigger, Ed. Holee ——, didja see his eyes? Didja? My ——, it went to forty below right then!"

Merrick nodded grimly.

"I guess that detective wasn't far off when he said that Hartley wasn't all smiles."

Hashknife leaned against the gate-post and watched them fade away in the dust. His eyes were normal now—lazy gray eyes which looked out across the hills, but did not see them; and there was a smile on his wide mouth. Laura was calling him from the veranda and he turned slowly to go back.

IT WAS supper time when Honey and Sleepy came back to the HJ and they brought Slim Coleman with them. They had met Slim near the west end of the bridge, and he rode over with them to have some supper before going back to the Lazy B.

Slim was almost the counterpart of Hashknife physically, being rather a high-pocket sort of individual. The girls welcomed Slim, for he was as one of the family—an old-timer in the Tumbling River and a bunkie of Honey Bee's when Honey was at the Lazy B.

"It's shore tough, this here offerin' of a reward, dead or alive, for Joe Rich," said Slim, who did not have a particle of diplomacy in his system.

Peggy gasped and fled from the room, while Honey proceeded to upbraid Slim for making such a foolish remark before Peggy.

"Well, how'd I know?" wailed Slim. "Nobody told me she was still feelin' right toward Joe."

"Didn't I tell yuh to not talk much about it?" demanded Honey angrily. "I told yuh that when we was crossin' the bridge."

"Yeah, I know yuh did. But I didn't talk much. My ——, I only said it was too bad!"

"Well, that's a lot, Slim. Peggy didn't know they wanted Joe for murder."

"Well, she knows it now. I s'pose I might as well be the one to break the news to her."

"Oh, it don't matter so much," said Hashknife. "She'd find it out tomorrow, anyway. We're all to be called on that inquest—me and Sleepy and Honey. It

won't amount to anythin'. They'll just bring in a verdict chargin' Joe with the murder."

"I was talkin' to Ross Layton before we left town," said Honey. "Kelsey is gettin' out new reward notices. He wanted the commissioners to vote more money on that reward, but Ross and Angus McLaren were against it."

"Kelsey's got the idea that some of Joe's friends are hidin' him, and that a bigger reward would make 'em trade him in."

Hashknife laughed heartily.

"That's a new one, Honey. I've heard of lots of reasons for offerin' rewards, but that's the first time I ever heard of tryin' to buy off a friendship."

"Well, that was Kelsey's idea. He's shore a bright sheriff. He thinks that an added reward would cause Joe's friends to pop him on the head and bring him in."

"It might, at that," said Hashknife.

Wong Lee called them to supper, but the two girls did not come to the table.

"Slim, you raised —— with yore remarks," whispered Honey.

"What do yuh mean?"

"Ruined the girls' appetites."

"Pshaw, I'm sorry about that."

They ate silently for several minutes, and then Slim laid down his knife and fork.

"I found somethin' funny today," he said. "I was ridin' down a coulee, kinda southeast of the Lazy B, and I finds a dead horse. Plenty buzzards feedin'. But the funny part of it is this: That horse has been skinned. Yessir, it shore had. I looked it all over and there ain't a sign of skin on it anywhere. And it kinda looked to me as though somebody had pulled the shoes off it, too. Anyway, it never traveled far after the shoes was taken off."

"Somebody needed horse-hide," observed Honey, helping himself to more food.

"Yeah, I s'pose they did," agreed Slim, resuming his meal. "It ain't a common thing for to skin a dead horse. It ain't been dead a —— of a long time. I didn't smell—"

"Hey!" snorted Honey. "What the —— do yuh think this is? We're eatin' a meal, Slim."

"Oh, I beg yore pardon."

"Could yuh find it again?" asked Hashknife grinning.

"Shore. If the wind's blowin' jist—"

"Wait a minute!" snorted Honey. "You let up on that departed critter, or I'll—I'll—"

"All right, Honey."

"About how long had the animal been dead, Slim?" asked Hashknife.

"Well, I'll tell yuh, Hartley. Judgin' from the—"

"Oh, ——!" exploded Honey.

He kicked back his chair and tramped out through the kitchen to the rear of the house, where he sat down on the well-curb and rolled a smoke.

Slim reached across the table, removed an egg from Honey's plate and placed it on his own.

"I can allus git extra food thataway," he grinned. "Honey ain't very strong. Too —— much 'magination, I'd say."

They finished their supper and went down to the bunk-house. Slim wanted to play pitch. Hashknife declined to be a party to any card arguments; so he stayed out of the game and went back to the ranch-house, where he found Wong Lee serving supper to Peggy and Laura.

No reference was made to Slim's statement about the reward, but it was rather difficult to find any conversation that did not connect with the troubles of Tumbling River. Laura essayed a few pieces of music on the old upright organ, while Peggy curled up in an old rocker, her chin on one hand. Hashknife sprawled on the sofa, his long legs crossed, while the blue smoke curled up from his cigaret.

"Don't you sing, Hashknife?" Laura turned on the stool and looked at Hashknife.

"Yeah, I sing—sometimes."

"Come and sing us a song."

"No-o-o-o, I don't think so, Laura. I'm what you'd call an absent-minded singer. I never sing when I know just what I'm doin'."

"Joe used to sing," said Peggy simply.

"And he had a good voice, too," added Laura.

There was a long period of silence. Finally Hashknife got to his feet and stood there for a long time, deep in thought. The two girls watched him curiously. Suddenly he looked at them, and a smile spread across his face.

"I just got some good news," he said.

"You got some good news?" Laura got up from the stool and stared at him. "How could you get some good news?"

Hashknife laughed softly and sat down again.

"I just got to thinkin'," he said. "Sometimes I get news thataway. Go ahead and play somethin', Laura."

For possibly an hour Laura played snatches of old songs, playing entirely by ear. Hashknife still sprawled on the sofa, his eyes closed. Several times Laura and Peggy exchanged amused glances, thinking he was asleep, but he was far from it. Finally Laura left the organ, and Hashknife opened his eyes.

"Play another one, Laura," he asked.

"Another one?" The little blond-headed girl laughed. "Why, I've been playing for over an hour, Hashknife."

"Thasso?" He smiled at her. "That shows how much I enjoyed yore music."

"I don't believe you were listening at all."

"Oh, yeah, I was."

The two girls decided to go to bed and left Hashknife to his cigaret-rolling. For another hour he smoked, only moving to throw a cigaret butt into the fireplace and to roll a fresh one. He had turned the lamp down low when the girls left the room and now he blew out the light, yawned heavily and went to the front door.

It was dark outside and the wind was blowing. He could see the dull glow of a light in the bunk-house window as he stepped off the porch. To the left and to the rear of the bunk-house was the main stable, behind which was part of the corral, which extended out from a front corner of the stable.

Hashknife was half-way to the bunk-house when something attracted his attention. It was down near the stable and sounded very much like a smothered cry. The wind was blowing from that direction. He stopped short, peering through the darkness. There was something moving down near the stable.

Hashknife hurried toward the stable, wondering whether it had been a cry or merely the sound of the stable door in the wind. Then he saw the bulk of a moving horse swinging around as if frightened, and he could hear the bang of the stable door swinging in the wind.

But before he could determine just what was going on, the flame of a revolver shot licked out toward him and he heard the bullet strike the ranch-house. Again and again the gun flashed; but Hashknife had dropped flat and was shooting back at the flashes.

He heard the bunk-house door slam open. Sleepy was running toward him, calling his name. The last flash came from the further corner of the stable front as the shooter darted behind cover. Honey was behind Sleepy, yelling for somebody to tell him what it was all about.

"Stop yellin'!" snapped Hashknife. "One of yuh circle this side of the corral. He's behind the stable. C'mon!"

Sleepy went galloping around the corral, while Hashknife and Honey swung wide of the stable. But the willows and other brush grew down within fifty feet of that side, affording plenty of cover for any one to make a getaway.

After a fifteen-minute search they gave up. It was so dark that a man could merely lie down on the ground and be invisible. They met at the front of the stable, and there they almost stumbled over Slim Coleman, who was sitting up. They heard him swear long and earnestly.

"What in —— happened to you, Slim?" asked Honey.

But Slim merely continued to swear, although he was able to walk back to the bunk-house without assistance. He had a lump over his left ear, a bruised nose, and some skin off his right knuckles.

He blinked in the lamplight and tried to grin.

"Talk about it," urged Honey.

"Talk about it, eh? Well, I dunno what to talk about. After I left the bunk-house I went to git my bronc. Didn't see a danged soul around there, but when I led my horse out I runs slap-dab into somebody. I thought it was one of you boys, comin' out to see if I was gettin' started.

"I started to say somethin', when I got the flash of a six-gun barrel, which almost knocked my nose off. It did jist scrape my nose. I couldn't see the feller very good, but I took a smash at him with my right fist, and I think I hit that —— gun. And then I got a wallop on the head and I seen all kinds of fireworks. It jist keeled me over, and I 'member tryin' to yell for help. The rest of it is kinda hazy. Whee-e-e! I've shore got me an awful headache."

"But who in —— was it?" wondered Honey. "Is there somebody tryin' to lay yuh out, Slim?"

"Must be. Feel of that bump."

"Honey," said Hashknife, "you better go up to the house and tell the girls what that shootin' was all about. Some of them bullets hit the house. And bring back a pan of hot water, so we can fix Slim's head."

Honey raced for the house and Slim sat down on a bunk. He was still a little dazed.

"Yore bronc is still there by the corral fence," said Sleepy.

"Uh-huh. I still had the lead-rope when I fell. Gee, I shore don't sabe it, boys. I dunno anybody that hates me enough to pop me in the dark. It's lucky he didn't hit any of yuh."

"Missed me a mile," grinned Hashknife.

In a few minutes Honey came back carrying a pan of water.

"The girls were scared stiff," he said. "One of them bullets busted the window on this side, and some of the others hit the house. They want me to sleep in the ranch-house."

"I'll bet that makes yuh sore," grinned Sleepy.

"Aw, jist put some horse-liniment on it and I'll head for home," said Slim. "It don't hurt much."

"Yo're not goin' home tonight," declared Hashknife. "This is no night for a tall jigger like you to be ridin'. Shuck off yore raiment and pile into Honey's bunk while me and Sleepy unsaddle yore bronc."

Slim's protests were very feeble.

"Curt Bellew will swear I got drunk and forgot to come home."

"We'll be yore alibi, Slim," assured Hashknife. "And more than that, I'm goin' to need yuh tomorrow."

"Well, all right. Go kinda tender on that pinnacle, cowboy. She's shore a blood-brother to a boil."

Hashknife fixed up Slim's head and then went up to the ranch-house, where he called Honey outside.

"We won't be here for breakfast," he told Honey. "Me and Sleepy and Slim are goin' to take a ride early in the mornin'; sabe? They're holdin' that inquest at two o'clock in the afternoon. You hitch up the buggy team in the mornin' and take the girls to town. Tell 'em I said for 'em to go, Honey. Be there for the inquest."

"But what for, Hashknife?"

"Just for fun, Honey. Good night."

"You'll be at the inquest, won't yuh?"

"Sure, I'm the main witness."

IT WAS an hour before daylight when Hashknife, Sleepy and Slim Coleman rode away from the HJ. Slim's head was a little sore, but the swelling was reduced. Sleepy protested against such an early start; which was the natural thing for him to do, especially since he didn't know where they were going.

They forded the river below the bridge—much to Sleepy's disgust. He got one boot full of water.

"Bridge is too narrow," said Hashknife, "and there's too much brush on the other side of it."

"You must be scared," laughed Sleepy.

The bootful of water made him feel particularly sarcastic. Anyway, he didn't like to ride with an empty stomach.

"Yeah, I'm scared," admitted Hashknife as they reached the other bank and climbed to the top.

"You take the lead, Slim," he said. "Take us to that dead horse."

"All right. It'll be kinda slow goin' in the dark, but it'll be daylight by the time we get there. Got to swing wide of the river on account of the breaks. We can eat breakfast at the Lazy B, if yuh want to."

"We'll look at the horse first, Slim. We may not get any breakfast."

"That's the —— of bein' pardner to a man who is so —— curious he'll get up in the middle of the night to hunt for a dead horse," said Sleepy.

They were obliged to travel slowly, and the cold morning wind caused Sleepy to swear at his wet feet. He was uncomfortable, and didn't care who knew it. The stars faded, and a rosy glow in the east proclaimed the coming of daylight.

Slim knew the country well, and had little difficulty in locating the correct coulee. A coyote streaked out through the brush and went loping off across the hills. He wasn't a bit curious about these cowboys. They often carried rifles, and were not a bit particular which coyote they shot at.

They found the carcass, and Hashknife did not take long in his examination. The other two men sat on their horses some distance away, holding Hashknife's horse. He came back and climbed into his saddle.

"Shall we go to the Lazy B and eat?" asked Slim.

Hashknife shook his head.

"No time to eat, Slim. Is there a place where we can cross the river down here?"

"Yeah, there's the old Circle M crossin'. They herd cattle across once in a while."

"That's fine. Lead us to it."

"My ——, you'd think he was a sailor!" wailed Sleepy. "He must be crazy about water. Oh, well, there's no use arguin' with him, Slim."

"You won't miss yore breakfast," assured Hashknife. "If I was as fat as you are I'd welcome a fast."

"I don't mind the breakfast but I'd like to know what it's all about," said Slim.

"Well, yuh won't know," declared Sleepy. "This jigger never tells. He's a single-handed secret society, he is, Slim."

Hashknife merely laughed and swung in beside them.

"Are yuh pretty good with a six-gun, Slim?"

"Pretty good? Meanin' what, Hartley?"

"Did yuh ever kill a man?"

"Nope," Slim shook his head violently. "Never had to."

"Would, if yuh had to, wouldn't yuh?"

"Sure—why not?"

"Yuh may have to."

Sleepy straightened up in his saddle. Slim looked quickly at Sleepy who was grinning widely. Sleepy always grinned when there was action in the wind.

"I don't quite *sabe* the drift of this, Hartley," said Slim. "Why should I have to kill a man?"

"To make him quit shootin'."

"Oh, yeah. Well—all right."

Slim drew his six-shooter, examined the cylinder critically and put it back.

"I wish I'd 'a' practised more," he said dryly.

Hashknife grinned in appreciation. He felt that Slim was a dependable man. They reached the west bank of the river and rode south for about a quarter of a mile to the Circle M crossing. The water was not deep here.

Old cottonwoods grew close to the water edge and there were many cattle standing among the trees. The cowboys rode out to the open country, almost within sight of the Circle M. Hashknife studied the country. Farther on and to their left was a rather high butte, fairly well covered with brush.

"On the other side of that is the Circle M road, ain't it?" asked Hashknife.

Slim nodded.

"Circles the bottom of it on that side. It's only a little ways to the Circle M. There's a little stream comes down on this side of the butte, and the road crosses it."

Hashknife took the lead now. He rode to the south of the butte, dismounted at the foot and tied his horse in the thick brush. The other boys followed him, and they walked up through the brush to the top of the butte.

Below, and not over four hundred yards to the south, were the ranch buildings of the Circle M. Hashknife squatted down on a rocky projection and told the others to keep out of sight. There was enough high brush to make an effectual screen.

The ranch-house of the Circle M was a rambling affair consisting of but one floor. The exterior was rough boards, weathered, unpainted. There were two stables and a number of low sheds, branding corral, bucking corral and general utility corrals. A number of loose horses were in the larger corral.

Smoke was pouring from the kitchen stovepipe, and in a few minutes a man came from the stable and went to the house.

"That's Ben Collins," said Slim. "I know his walk."

"Have they got a Chink cook?" asked Sleepy.

"Nope. Dutch Siebert does most of the cookin'. He's a puncher. Ed never could keep a cook, it seems, so he uses Dutch. He's an awful flat-head."

"Merrick?"

"No—Siebert. Danged flat-faced, obstinate sort of a cuss."

Sleepy stretched out on the ground and pillowed his head on his arms.

"Wake me up early, mother; I'm to be queen of the May," he grinned. "If yuh won't tell me what we're doin' here, I'm goin' to take a nap. Yuh might as well sleep, Slim."

"Go ahead," said Hashknife. "I'll wake yuh up in time."

Slim needed no second invitation, but slid out full length.

Hashknife made himself comfortable, but not to sleep. He kept an eye on the ranch-buildings, and several times he saw Merrick and Collins together. He knew Merrick well enough to distinguish him at that distance.

Time dragged on and the sun grew hot up

there on the top of that knoll, but Hashknife had the patience of an Indian. It was nearly eleven o'clock when he saw Merrick and Collins saddle their horses at the corral. A third man came out from the house and talked with them, and Hashknife was sure this man was Dutch Siebert. He was bigger than either of the other two, who were fairly big men.

In a little while Merrick and Collins mounted their horses and moved away from the ranch on the road which led to Pinnacle City. They were going to attend the inquest. Hashknife paid no more attention to them, but noted the time of their leaving and estimated about how long it would take them to reach the town. Dutch Siebert played with a dog in the yard for a few minutes, then went into the house.

Hashknife settled back and rolled a cigaret. Sleepy woke up, swore a few lines, shifted to more shade and went back to sleep. But Hashknife did not become impatient. He knew what he was going to do, and it was something that required fairly accurate timing. He knew that Merrick and Collins would ride fairly fast and would cover that eight miles in less than an hour.

It was thirty minutes past the noon hour when Hashknife woke Sleepy and Slim. Both required some stretching to get the kinks out of their muscles. Hashknife led the way back to the horses, where they mounted, and circled around to the road near the place where the little stream crossed it. Hashknife dismounted at the stream. They were almost in view of the ranch, the main gate being just around a brushy turn in the road.

Sleepy was curious as to what Hashknife intended doing, and his curiosity was even greater when he saw Hashknife take a chunk of yellow soap from his pocket.

"What'sa big idea, cowboy?" he asked. "Goin' to take a bath?"

"Git off and help me," grinned Hashknife.

They dismounted and Sleepy held the horse while Hashknife filled his hat with water, poured it over the shoulders of the animal and began rubbing in the soap.

"The idea is," grunted Hashknife, "to make us look like we've come to beat ——!"

"Lather, eh?" grunted Slim. "Gimme half that soap, and I'll fix up this side. You hold the rollin' stock, Sleepy."

It did not take long for them to make that horse look as if it had run many miles. They splashed and rubbed until Hashknife stepped back and grinned his appreciation. Then he scooped up a double handful of dust, threw it in the air and let it settle on him, like white ash.

"All right, boys," he said, swinging into the saddle. "Stay where yuh are until I go past. Then leave yore broncs here and sneak in, keepin' under cover. If I need yuh, you'll get a signal. Now, get back, 'cause I'm goin' to throw dust."

He rode back about two hundred yards, swung the horse around and came past them as fast as the horse could run. The pounding hoofs threw dust all over them, but they tied their horses and ran along the road, keeping against the brush.

Hashknife did not slacken speed, until almost at the door of the ranch-house. Big Dutch Siebert stepped to the doorway and the sliding hoofs slithered gravel against the half-open door.

Hashknife's coming was so sudden that the Dutchman did not seem to know just what to do. And Hashknife was out of the saddle and around to Dutch almost before the horse came to a stop. Hashknife took one keen look back up the road, whirled on Dutch and stepped to the threshold.

"Get inside—quick!" snapped Hashknife.

Siebert stepped back quickly. He was a huge man, flat of face, narrow-eyed, one side of his mouth sagging from a big chew of tobacco. Once his big right hand swayed back past his holstered gun, but came away. He was being rushed so fast he didn't have time to think. And Dutch Siebert was not a fast thinker.

"Ed sent me!" snapped Hashknife. "He didn't dare to come, because they're watchin' him. There's been a leak, Dutch. Ed says to get Joe out of here as fast as yuh can, because they're comin' to search the place. You know what that means? Hurry up, you —— fool; they're comin'!"

Siebert gasped foolishly, whirled on his heel and almost ran into the kitchen. He grasped the heavy kitchen table, whirled it aside and started to drop to one knee. Then he swung around. Dutch Siebert was beginning to think. His hand jerked back to his gun, but he moved too late.

Hashknife was on top of him, driving him against the wall, while Hashknife's

right hand, gripping a heavy gun, described a short downward arc, and Dutch Siebert ceased to think for a while.

Hashknife picked up Dutch's gun, ran to the doorway and wig-wagged wildly with both arms. Sleepy and Slim broke from the fringe of brush and came running across the yard.

"One of yuh go to the stable and get a rope!" yelled Hashknife.

Sleepy veered off and headed for the stable.

"Did the soap and water work?" asked Slim, panting from his run.

"It always works," grinned Hashknife. "C'mon in."

CHAPTER IX

THE INQUEST

"HAVE you seen anythin' of Slim Coleman, Len?" Curt Bellew leaned in through the doorway of the sheriff's office and spoke to Kelsey, who was oiling a gun.

"Ain't seen him," said Kelsey shortly.

"That's funny. He started for town yesterday. I've been all over this darned place and I can't find him and nobody has seen him."

Kelsey did not show much interest, so Curt snorted and walked away. He was a little worried about Slim. Honey Bee and the two girls drove into town and left their rig at the livery-stable. Uncle Hozie and Aunt Emma were in town, and the old lady immediately took charge of the girls, much to Honey's relief, because he didn't know what to do with them.

The Heavenly Triplets were in town but were keeping strictly sober. One reason was that they were not only broke but badly in debt. The morning train had brought the conductor, brakeman and fireman of the cattle-train to identify the dead brakeman, and to testify at the inquest.

Curt Bellew, still looking for the missing Slim, ran into Honey Bee. It seemed that everybody in town knew by this time that Slim was missing.

"Aw, he was at the HJ all night," said Honey. "He was goin' home, all right, Curt, but somebody bent a gun over his head. By golly, we had quite a shootin' scrape out there! Somebody emptied a gun at Hashknife Hartley, but didn't touch him."

"Honey, you ain't lyin', are yuh?" asked Curt. There were several interested listeners.

"I shore ain't, Curt," declared Honey. "Slim needed a little patchin' up, but he's all right."

"Where is he now?"

"I can't tell yuh, Curt—because I don't know m'self."

Several questions were fired at Honey, but he had the same answer for each. In the meantime Curt went back to Kelsey's office and asked him whether he had heard about the shooting at the HJ.

"What shootin', Curt?"

Curt told him what Honey had said about it.

"Why would anybody hit Slim Coleman?" asked Kelsey.

"That's the question without any answer."

"Where are Hartley and Stevens?"

"I dunno. Mebbe they're with Slim."

Ed Merrick and Ben Collins rode in from the Circle M, and heard about Slim's experience before they had their horses tied. Abe Liston of the 3W3 gave them the news.

"By ——, they can't lay that on to Joe Rich," declared Abe. "Slim and Joe were darned good friends."

"Where's Slim now?" asked Merrick.

"Nobody knows, except that he's with them other punchers at the HJ. Honey Bee and the two girls just came in a while ago, and Honey says he don't know where they are."

Merrick found Honey a little later and asked him about the incident. He told Merrick about the same story Abe had told, except that he elaborated on the shooting in the dark between Hashknife and the unknown gunman.

"Well, what do yuh make of it?" asked Merrick.

"I don't know," laughed Honey. "Looks like somebody had gone plumb crazy."

"Does look like it, Honey. What did Hartley think?"

"That feller never says what he thinks, Ed. He bandaged Slim's head and made him stay all night. Slim wanted to go home, but Hashknife told him it was a bad night for a tall cowpuncher to be ridin' around.

"Him and Sleepy and Slim pulled out before daylight, but didn't tell me where they

were goin'. Yuh never can find out anythin' from Hashknife. He just grins at yore questions. It's a wonder they didn't accuse me of bustin' Slim."

Honey laughed and grimaced at the thought.

"Accuse you?" queried Merrick.

"Yeah. Yuh see, Slim ruined my supper. He told about findin' a horse that had been skinned. Why in —— anybody would skin a horse is a mystery to me. But anyway, they got to talkin' about that dead horse. Hashknife was interested, it seemed, and when Slim saw it was botherin me, they went strong."

Merrick laughed shortly.

"Yeah, it's a wonder they didn't accuse yuh of hittin' him. Mebbe they went to look at the dead horse."

"I wouldn't put it past 'em," laughed Honey. "But they'll be here for the inquest, Ed."

Even with the range well represented in Pinnacle City there was not a great deal of interest in the inquest over the body of the brakeman. He was a stranger, and there was but one verdict to be brought in. It would be merely a matter of form. In fact, the rewards were already printed, charging Joe Rich with the murder and offering thirty-five hundred dollars for him dead or alive, or for information that would lead to his arrest. It did not mention conviction. As far as that goes, he was already convicted.

Old Doctor Curzon decided to hold the inquest in a court-room. The crowd was too large for his little home and the county would not pay him for trampled flowerbeds. The body had already been identified by the trainmen. Aunt Emma, Peggy and Laura had taken seats in the Flying H wagon. They were not going up to the court-room. Aunt Emma wanted to find Honey and make him take the girls back home.

"Why did he bring you?" demanded the old lady. "With all this talk goin' on! I'll sure tell him where to head in!"

"I think it was Hashknife's idea, Auntie," said Peggy wearily.

"It was, eh? And who's he to tell you what to do? The sooner you quit cryin' over Joe Rich the better you'll be off. After all he's done to you! Peggy, you ought to have sense."

"There comes Hashknife now!" exclaimed Peggy.

It seemed like a cry of hope. Something seemed to tell her that this tall cowboy riding up the middle of the street, sitting very straight in his saddle, was bringing a ray of sunshine.

He did not seem interested in the crowd. Straight to the hitch-rack he came, dismounted slowly and tied the horse.

As he stepped away from the animal he saw the three women in the wagon and smiled at them as he touched the brim of his hat with his right hand. They watched him angle across the street, going toward the sheriff's office. Kelsey and Angus McLaren were coming from the office and stopped to speak with Hashknife. After a few moments of conversation they saw Kelsey turn and go back to the office with Hashknife.

Peggy kept her eyes glued to the office-door, disregarding the advice of Aunt Emma, who was telling her what she should do. In a few minutes Hashknife came slowly outside and back up the street. It was two o'clock.

Near the entrance of the court-house Hashknife met the Heavenly Triplets, who were anxious to get a front seat. He said something to Lonnie Myers, and after a few moments the three men followed him farther up the street, where they held a short, earnest conversation. Following the conversation the three men went back to the court-house and went inside.

Hashknife leaned against the front of the general store and rolled a smoke. Jack Ralston and Buck West crossed the street from the Pinnacle saloon, and Hashknife called to Jack. The deputy came over to him and they held a short conversation, after which they headed for the sheriff's office and went inside.

"There's something goin on," declared Peggy. "But where are Sleepy and Slim, do you suppose?"

"I can't even suppose," replied Aunt Emma. "I hope that inquest won't take long. Hozie will stay until the last dog is hung, you may be sure of that. And us out here in this hot sun. But that's a man for yuh!"

"You came in for the inquest, didn't you, Aunt Emma?" asked Laura.

"I did not—Hozie did. I have no interest in things of that kind."

"There is Hashknife now!" exclaimed Peggy.

The tall cowboy was standing at the door of the court-house, and none of them had seen him leave the sheriff's office. After a few moments of deliberation, he went in and climbed the stairs.

The rather spacious court-room was not filled. There were possibly fifty people in the room. Lonnie Myers stood near the doorway at the top of the stairs; Dan Leach was at the opposite corner, at the rear; while Nebrasky Jones sat in a front seat, very erect and very dignified.

Doctor Curzon had already selected a jury when Hashknife came in; and the six men, Curt Bellew, Eph Harper, Jimmy Black of the 3W3, Buck West, Fred Thornton, a feed-store keeper, and Jud Albertson, a blacksmith, were occupying the jury-box.

Fred Coburn, the prosecuting attorney, was the only lawyer in the room. Hashknife moved down to the front and took the only available seat. Across the aisle from him sat Ben Collins. Farther back and across the aisle sat Merrick and Angus McLaren, the Circle M owner on the outside seat.

Old Doctor Curzon conferred with the attorney for several moments before calling the inquest to order.

"I believe we will have the testimony of the sheriff first," he said, looking around the room.

But neither the sheriff nor deputy were in evidence.

"Will some one call the sheriff?" asked Coburn.

Hashknife got slowly to his feet and half turned in the narrow aisle, while his glance swept the audience. His face seemed a little pale and his lips were shut tightly. Then—

"The sheriff won't be here," he said distinctly. "Neither will the deputy. Their evidence is locked up, and I've got the key in my pocket."

For several moments the room was hushed.

"I don't believe we quite understand you," said Coburn.

"It was plain English," replied Hashknife.

"But—but—" spluttered the attorney. No one else spoke; all were too interested for words.

"So we'll jist have to do without 'em," said Hashknife. "Yuh see, I'm playin' safe, folks."

His lips twisted to a grin, but his eyes were cold, mirthless.

"This is an inquest over the body of a murdered man, a man who was shot down in the performance of his duty, and he was killed at a time when the lives of a lot of folks might have been at stake.

"You've merely met here as a matter of form to make it legal to hunt down and destroy Joe Rich. Ain't I right?"

"Perfectly!" snapped the attorney.

"Uh-huh. Well, how would it be to git a little of that testimony from a real interested party?" Hashknife glanced toward the doorway.

"C'mon in," he said loudly.

The crowd surged around in their seats, gasping in amazement. Joe Rich was limping down the aisle. He was clad in an old gray shirt and a pair of bib-overalls, old misfitting shoes; his unshaven face, dirty; hair matted. A gasp went up from the crowd as Joe halted beside Hashknife and turned to look at them. He appeared years older, weak. His eyes were bloodshot, and the wrists below the shirt-sleeves were scored from rope burns.

"The main witness," said Hashknife. "Look him over, folks. Does he look like a man who had killed and robbed?"

Still the crowd did not move. They seemed content to sit still and gaze at the man. Then a man strangled, a chair rattled. It was Ed Merrick, the owner of the Circle M. He had whirled in his chair and started for the door, running like a drunken man, but his way was blocked by Sleepy, Slim Coleman and Lonnie Myers and three guns were shoved in his face.

He stopped, staggered sidewise and whirled around, his gun in his hand. But before he could use it, Sleepy and Lonnie landed on him with a rush and he went down, struggling wildly.

Ben Collins had not moved. He merely flinched when Hashknife leaned across him and took away his gun. He seemed in a daze.

"Got him!" panted Sleepy.

Hashknife looked toward the doorway. Peggy was coming in, her eyes wide, staring down at Joe who had not seen her. Slim touched her on the arm, but she did not stop.

Hashknife beckoned her and she ran down the aisle. Joe turned and saw her coming toward him and the next moment

he had her in his arms, while Hashknife hastily sidestepped and took Ben Collins by the arm.

"C'mon, Collins," he said. "You need exercise."

"Lemme have him," said Nebrasky. "Me and Dan can handle him real good. I've got a rope handy."

"All right, Nebrasky."

Hashknife turned to face the prosecuting attorney.

"What is this all about?" he demanded. "Don't you realize what—"

"Better than anybody else," smiled Hashknife. "Here," he handed a key to Dan Leach. "There's two more cells empty. Put Collins in one and Merrick in the other."

"Well, I'll be darned!" That was about as near as Fred Coburn ever came to using profanity.

Uncle Hozie was pawing at Hashknife, masticating violently and staring at Joe Rich and Peggy.

"Wh-what about him?" demanded Uncle Hozie, pointing at Joe.

"Oh, don't bother 'em," grinned Hashknife. "Listen, you folks. I've got the whole story. Dutch Siebert is hog-tied at the Circle M and we found Joe Rich in a cellar under the house, where he's been since the day he rode out of town.

"Joe Rich didn't get drunk on his weddin' night. He took two drinks of liquor with Len Kelsey in the Arapaho saloon, and Len slipped him some knockout drops. Joe knew he hadn't been drunk, but there wasn't any way to prove it. Merrick practically forced Joe to appoint Kelsey, and it was Merrick's idea to discredit Joe in order to make Kelsey sheriff. Merrick wanted to own the law.

"Well, he done a —— good job of it. In fact, he overdone his job. That bridge wasn't hit by lightning; it was set on fire to let Merrick get off that express car after he had robbed the safe. Collins and Dutch Siebert were there with the horses, and they set the fire. The brakeman ran into 'em and they killed him. Anybody with any sense would have known it couldn't be a one-man job. The man who robbed that safe couldn't have killed the brakeman, because he was put out of the way before the train stopped.

"And Joe Rich did not rob Jim Wheeler. That was done by Siebert and Collins, after Merrick had given Wheeler just one thousand dollars. Merrick made out two notes, and Jim Wheeler thought one was a duplicate. He read his own—and signed Merrick's which read 'five thousand.' But Jim Wheeler lost his note, and I found it under the sidewalk, over there by the Pinnacle Saloon. I don't know how they found it out, but I reckon they did, because last night they mistook Slim Coleman for me and batted him over the head.

"But they overdone the evidence part at both the train and at the bank. I didn't know Joe Rich, but from what I could learn he was intelligent—too danged intelligent to wear those leather cuffs, lose a knife with his initials on it and all that. Merrick and Jack Ralston caught Joe that first day. That is, they downed his horse, and took him to the Circle M. They had to skin that animal to keep anybody from seein' it was Joe's horse.

"And here's the particularly devilish part of it all: They were tryin' to pile up a big reward, soak Joe with a murder charge and make it dead or alive. Know what that means? It means that they were going to kill Joe and get that money, make heroes out of themselves and live happy for a long time on the money they've got in that cellar. That's the story, folks."

The room was in an uproar following the finish of the story. They wanted to get outside where there was more room to talk. But Hashknife knew they were going to do more than talk. They were clattering down the stairs when Hashknife touched Joe on the arm.

"Get down there," he said softly. "Yo're the sheriff yet, Joe—Kelsey's disqualified. Stop 'em at the door. They'll listen to yuh, kid."

Joe ran from the room and they heard him going down the steps. Peggy was looking at Hashknife, her eyes filled with tears, as she held out her hands to him.

"Oh, it was wonderful," she said. "But I knew you would do something wonderful; I knew it, Hashknife."

"Yeah," he said bashfully. "It worked out pretty good."

"Oh, I don't know how you did it, Hashknife. Everybody was against Joe. Why did you think he was innocent? What made you think it was a plot against him?"

"I looked at you," said Hashknife simply.

"And I figured that a man you'd love—well, I figured right, Peggy."

They went down the stairs. A crowd had gathered in front of the sheriff's office, and Joe was talking to them, backed against the door. He was flanked on one side by Slim Coleman, and on the other by Honey Bee. And then the crowd began to disperse. Aunt Emma and Peggy met them at the bottom of the stairs, and Laura kissed Hashknife before he was aware of her intentions.

Angus McLaren came up to Hashknife and held out his hand.

"Har-rtley, I've nothin' to say. Ye take my breath away. If I've anythin' to say about it—Joe's still sheriff. He talked 'em out of usin' ropes, and he's suffered enough to entitle him to somethin'. And there's a reward for ye, man—the money that was offered for Joe Rich. We've got him back, and he's worth every cent we're payin' for him."

Hashknife smiled and shook his head.

"We don't want money, McLaren—only enough for two fares East. The rest will help Peggy start housekeepin' with the man she kept on lovin', in spite of —— and high water."

"Two fares East?" queried McLaren.

"Yeah. Yuh see, we missed our train the night we came."

"Oh, I see."

"And Sleepy will like it, yuh know. I have to kinda humor him once in a while."

"But you're not going away for years and years," declared Peggy. "Not after what you've done, Hashknife. Stay here in the Tumbling River with all of us."

"Ye fit well in here," said McLaren.

"And here comes Joe," said Laura. "We'll see what he has to say about you going away, Mister Man."

"And you tell me some time," smiled Hashknife. "It'll keep."

He hurried away to find Sleepy, who was regaling a crowd with a story of the lathered horse.

"It's shore funny how things work out," he said. "Here we were headin' East for a little trip, and all this happens."

"Are yuh goin' to keep on headin' East?" asked one of the crowd.

"Not us," said Sleepy. "I'm all out of the notion."

Hashknife turned and went across the street, where he intercepted McLaren.

"We've changed our minds about goin' East," he said. "We'll take a couple of horses and saddles instead of them tickets, McLaren."

"All right," laughed McLaren. "Where are you goin', lad?"

"Somewhere on the other side of the hill."

"What hill, Hartley?"

"The next one," smiled Hashknife.

Let

Lewis J. Rendel

Tell you of

The Place of Birds

"THAT old hoodoo man," Caree remarked, "is fixing to raise trouble."

His southern Mississippi drawl dripped memories of magnolias, corn pone, and big moons sitting on top of levees. His length, outlined against the light, was of that slimness which is so deceiving until it comes to action. He lounged casually into the cane and palm-frond shack, stooped to light a lace-bark cigaret at the fire-hole, then draped himself along a grass hammock.

"Yes, boy," he nodded across to Weatherbee, "and the short end of that trouble is going to be *us*."

It was five o'clock, and the twelve-hour day of the equator was preparing for its close. Already the jungle held the night which the sun kept at bay. Trees, trees, everywhere trees, springing in a monstrous fecundity which seemed to press in one's very heart and lungs. Trees, trees; gray columns roped about with vines, and overhead a green darkness like some eternal cloud.

Through a merciful break, where a sluggish waterway crawled between giant reeds, came a glimpse of a lagoon. Like a sheet of fallen sky it stretched away to where the high forest was pale green beyond it. Near the center was an islet, merely a tuft of higher swamp crowded with moriche palms. Their huge fans stood out against the yellowing west, dark and motionless as if made from cast iron.

And everywhere were birds. Long-legged herons stalked among incredible water-lilies. Stilted cranes and *hivari* storks; flocks of silver-sheeted ducks; humming-birds like

living jewels; giant macaws perching in crude vermilions and blue. And over the islet, a perpetual flight of green parrots, wheeling in screeching discord.

Blowing a thin stream of smoke from his nostrils, Caree spoke again, in grim disgust.

"It's Appa-Tou, the Place of Birds, all right—but no place for a white human. Listen to these be-blasted parrots, will you. And these brown heathen niggers think they're the souls of their ancestors, bringing messages from the dead, just because they can imitate man talk. Where'd you get those flowers, fella?"

They stood in a calabash of water by Weatherbee's side. A sort of lily, they seemed, malignantly purple, with big onion-like bulbs attached. Weatherbee glanced at them with a deliberate indifference.

"Oh—those?"

"Yeah, those," Caree mocked, "since there aren't no others."

"One of Akiepe's kids brought them to me."

"The kids," Caree sighed, "are friendly to us. Some of the ladies seem inclined to be pleasant, too. But, oh, buddy, Nature knew her business when she made civilized women fond of clothes. If they all had to go around like these Bugres dames, with nothing on their carcasses but sun and air, there wouldn't be half so much marrying done. What do you call those flowers, anyhow?"

Caree had a way of suddenly shooting back to a subject after he had apparently forgotten it. But Weatherbee was accustomed to that. He kept his face blank as he felt the other's eyes watching him from between narrowed, sleepy lids.

"I don't know until I dissect one."

"Botanizing, eh? Watch out, fella, they look kind of poison."

"I've got to do something," Weatherbee burst out, "lying here with a smashed leg; nothing but a rotten nuisance to myself and you. And a lot of beastly Indians watching us, with that infernal old Quaguia stirring up heaven knows what. Besides—"

"Yeah? Besides—" Caree yawned.

Weatherbee was silent. Caree looked at him, stretched out on the cane cot, clad only in a wrecked shirt, with one leg cased in a mold of dried river clay. A white youth, pallid and fretful from pain and confinement, held helplessly in a palm shack sunk somewhere in these unknown reaches of upper Surinam.

BY CONTRAST Caree's inner eyes went back to their first meeting.

That had been at Nickerie, three hundred miles away, down where the Corentyn swashes through the sea-swamps of the Atlantic fringe. To Caree, just then, it had been merely the first place across the British Guiana border. It seemed so difficult to keep from having trouble with those English. Especially if one was American, twenty-seven years old, and sole owner of a coughing, rickety motor launch.

He could see that place again. Tall coconut palms spidering up against the clouds; green water lapping at worn jetty piles. Sloops drying their sails after some furtive night cruise to the British shore. A huge warehouse full of nothing; cluttering, paintless negro cabins full of less. For himself, empty pockets, an emptier gas-tank, and the Georgetown trade barred against him by silly inquiries about his "ship-papers." The comfort was that one can always eat down in Surinam. Also that, in the tropics, things have such a way of turning up.

They had turned up, that day, as two white men came pounding important feet along the rotting wharf.

Blake was the first; rather fussing along, as small men do. With his enormous goggles, his keen little nose already sniffing for botanical conquest, he looked exactly what he was—a professor from a minor, fresh-water university, out for a year of original research.

Weatherbee was just behind him. Caree's mouth creased to a slow grin as he remembered the other on that day.

A fellow of only twenty-one, and, heaven knew, good-looking enough in his blond fashion. He strode up, with his college laugh and hand-shake, his long-stemmed college pipe clamped between his teeth, a sun-helmet at a rakish, college angle above it. He was a complete vision of strapped puttees, a dozen buttoned pockets, a wrist watch, gauntlets and correct hunting-knife.

"He's got everything on," Caree had instantly thought, "except maybe the doormat and the kitchen stove." He had felt Weatherbee's glance trailing with an alumnus smile over his own torn singlet, soiled ducks and bare feet.

They wanted a launch to take them the

four weeks' journey up the Corentyn to the cataracts. From there they were to go on by canoe up the Siparimi to the edge of the Tumuca-Humao country. Caree had stared at that. He knew the rumors of those uncharted lands beyond the Hingui Hills. These fellows, coming from nowhere, smelling of street cars, evening papers and campus elms, were as two innocents brightly demanding to be taken to the confines of the Pit. But it meant a job. And a job was what he most needed.

It was from the Dutch magistrate that the warnings had come. He sat on his screened gallery, a mass of tallowy flesh hung about with pyjamas which had lost both fastenings and discretion.

"So you would to Tumuca-Humao go, *hein?*" he asked, and his eyes, like those of some greedy pig, twinkled with a peculiarly Dutch humor. "Thad is der Landt of der Losdt, up there—zo!"

It had been curiously like this present scene, up in that sinisterly named country. Palms stiff against a yellowing sky. The fireflies beginning their nightly witch-dance. That mass of obscene flesh gurgling his would-be English.

"They go—*ja*. Up to the gadaracdts they go, and there they ganoes tdake. *Und* we down herein it with the flowers say, for never gome they back."

He reeked with the nasty, leering humors of the Boompjes, pouring out unpleasant tales which had come seeping down along the choked, lazy currents of the Corentyn. Blake and Weatherbee had sat silent, in the complete contrast of their cool, clean keenness. Oh, they had listened. But they had listened in that detached, academic way which has nothing to do with the real world. They listened as they would to a theoretic text-book.

Caree was listening too, wearily unshocked by the grosser things. His ears, frayed open by hard experience, were alert for the bits of real information. He knew that this was the voice of country speaking. Tumuca-Humao, from which not one in a dozen returned— But it was a job.

There had come a conviction in his brain—

"If I go, it'll be up to me."

He wondered now why he had chosen to come on with them from the cataract. Three weeks of kicking the launch over the Corentyn sand-bars; then a vista of tumbling water, a plastered wall with the Dutch flag flopping above it. This was the farthest thrust which that Netherland civilization had been able to make. Above, all was rumor and a few travelers' tales. Perhaps what had brought Caree on was that absurd urge which men have to go and see. Or possibly that equally absurd feeling of being dry-nurse to these two cultured babes in the Surinam woods.

He had come; and that was the important thing. Come up through the gorges of the Hingui barrier and into the little known. A higher, rolling land of enormous purple distances. A dreamy land, and an empty one, at first sight. Then, as they will in actual dreams, things began to appear.

Nothing complete; merely pieces seen through rifts in the green mask with which the jungle meets the river. An arm, a brown face, a section of a copper-colored body. The land was watching them, and waiting its own good time for whatever it intended.

It made one wonder whether that floating tree had come adrift all by itself? It had come on them so suddenly, round a bend, filling the brown channel with its lengthwise bulk. Rolling over and over it came, its torn roots and branches threshing like side-wheels. There had been time for only a shout, a dive. He had seen Weatherbee come after him, while poor Blake stood upright, held in a horrible moment of fascinated irresolution. From the eddy near the bank, Caree saw Weatherbee struck down by a root. Then the floating juggernaut rolled the canoe under.

There was a glimpse of Blake, caught high on a branch like some strange fruit, only to be pounded down again.

Weatherbee's face, close to his own, the white lips telling him—

"My leg—broken—"

"YOU can thank your Uncle Sam for this," Caree had said, as he set Weatherbee's leg with the rough skill born of first-aid lessons. "I learned this trick while helping make the world safe for the Bolsheviks by polishing brass on a reformed stern-wheeler round Pensacola navy-yard. Fifteen months, fella, I held the Hun at bay with a handful of cotton waste, and it sure made me what I am today. They hadn't ought," he declared, as he tightened a grass band round a splint,

"to give a guy so much time to think. Because it's ten to one, boy, that what he thinks isn't going to be worth a whoop. Tomorrow I'll fix that leg in a mess of clay, and then, barring snakes, centipedes, alligators, panthers, cyclones and Bugres Indians, you'll be sitting pretty."

The canoe he had found, thrown up on a sand-bar, with one of the kit-bags still wedged under a seat. Next day he had discovered this lagoon, and its solitary islet tufted with palms. It was that isle of parrots, they knew now, that was the real Appa-Tou, so feared that no Indian would set foot on it.

"THE Place of Birds," Weatherbee wondered. "See here, if it comes to the worst, couldn't we go out there? Not one of them would come after us there."

"And with the water rising two foot a day," Caree said, "how long before we'd be above our necks? We aren't made, you and me, to hang on a palm fan like a screeching parrot."

"What do you think Quaguia's up to?"

The name brought a silence in which both saw things. The huddled cane shelters on the lagoon bank; the unashamed nakedness which had nothing of Eden in it. Inturned toes, stringy legs and protruding bellies; faces flatly brown under shocks of black hair, lighted by eyes which seemed to hold nothing but dark suspicions. And Quaguia, wrapping his wrinkled flesh in toucan feathers, the sole authority and medium between their earthly life and those vocal souls of their dead fluttering in the jungle-top. There was something of subtlety about old Quaguia. And when his beady eyes fell upon the two white men, they seemed to twinkle with unpleasantly luscious expectations.

"He's got," Caree exploded, "two of those —— doll things. Yes, fella, I saw them myself, in his hut. It's from round hereabouts that they come."

Even Weatherbee's pallor showed itself capable of further whitening. Their glances met in a long stare, and each knew what the other was remembering.

That Dutchman had been a true voice. They could see him again as he turned, with an unpleasant split in the back of his pyjamas, and padded into his house to bring out his treasure. The smell of the just-lighted oil lamp; a thousand winged pests thumping on the screens as they flung themselves toward the light. And the thing the Dutchman brought—

A doll, they had thought it at first. A man doll, three feet long, made of tanned, soft leather. But what doll was ever so perfect? It lay there under the lamp; wizened, puckered, horribly complete. It was Caree who first caught its meaning, stepping hastily back in quick nausea. He had heard of these things. Weatherbee had felt the other's disgust, and his eyes widened. Only Blake hung over it, fussing and peering in scientific curiosity.

"A remarkable piece of handiwork," he declared, and the Dutchman gurgled back.

"Godt's handiwork, my friendt. Thad was once a man—*und* perhaps a whitde one."

He had told them, in a rich relish, as much as any one could of that unknown Bugres process of "shucking" the flesh and muscles from a human body, of stuffing, drying and shrinking it so that it came out a pygmy but in a horrid perfection of shape.

"*Und*," the Dutchman finished, "der besd is thad as much as possible is done while der vigtim alife is."

IT WAS long before either of them spoke. The swift darkness had clamped down like the lid of a great hot oven. Caree rose, dropped some more wood on the fire-hole, lighted another lace-bark cigaret and touched the calabash of lilies with his foot.

"Those things certainly stink. What you say to my throwing them out?" he suggested.

"No. I want them. I had to give that kid a razor blade to get them."

Caree considered that, in sudden sharpness.

"You must sure have needed them, boy."

"I did—and I do."

Caree lingered, hitching the belt about his thin middle.

"I found a coupla Mammee apples," he offered. "That's a start toward supper. And there's always that bemassacred cassada. I'll ooze on down to my fish-lines. Maybe some poor fool Sucururu has mistook my bait for health food." He paused again, turned away, then added, with some intention. "Most like I'll be gone quite a while."

Weatherbee listened until the dark silence sopped up the rustle of the other's going.

In the flicker from the fire-hole his pallor had a greenish tinge. A chill sweat stood out on his forehead. Behind it thoughts, futile as they always are, chased each other in weary riot. Caree—himself—their first meeting. He wondered, now, how in high heaven he could ever have looked on Caree with that fraternity-house smile. He knew better now. Caree was worth ten—twenty of such as— If they only had a gun— But rifles, ammunition, all had been rolled into the Siparimi mud. They were helpless as two steers waiting the pole-ax. Hitched, both of them, to the post of his own broken leg.

Old Quaguia, sitting in his cane shack, blinking and waiting until the time should be mysteriously ripe— Dolls—horrible, horrible, shrunken dolls, in all their ghastly completeness—what had that fat Dutchman said? "As much as possible done while the victim is still alive—"

He himself, in his weakened state, wouldn't last long. But Caree was tough— Oh, yes, Caree would be quite a while dying, pegged helplessly down while those half-simian surgeons cut the living flesh from his bones— And but for the hitching-post of a crippled companion, Caree would have long ago found a means of escape.

Well, that chain could be cut.

With a hand that hardly shook, Weatherbee lifted the purple lilies from the calabash. Six hours they had steeped. The water would be deadly enough now. Caree would come back, no doubt of that. Caree always came back, but he would find himself set free— Things flashed in bewildering confusion— Campus elms, co-eds, class politics— A hot and horrid silence, where things more horrid still bided their time— His jaw stiffened as he raised the calabash to his lips—

Another hand shot over his shoulder, spinning the calabash out into the darkness. A kick sent the lilies after it. Weatherbee fell back on his pillow of stuffed leaves, and his pride of self-control left him.

Caree could always keep silence when he chose. He was doing it now, cross-legged by the fire-hole, his back to the cot. Not until those laboring breaths came back to something like normal did he turn.

"Well, fella?"

Weatherbee raised himself in red rage.

"You blazing, super-saturated ass! Don't you see it would all have been over now? Can't you realize that, but for your fool butting in, you'd be shut of me—that you could get *away?*"

The smoke from Caree's perpetual cigaret curled lazily from his nostrils.

"Do you suppose, guy, that I didn't think of all that while I was outside there, looking in at you?"

"Then why—"

Caree took his time about answering, bending to turn the cassada roasting on the embers. The up-thrown light made his face look rigid, almost luminous. At last his speech came.

"Because, fella, I couldn't see if I did that how I'd ever be able to go to bed with myself again."

"But can't you realize—"

Caree hushed him down with a flat hand.

"Buddy, I'm the best realizer they ever put breath in. And seeing we've started being kind of intimate, I'll tell you some of what I've realized. You're a bit young to know it, but I'll tell you this. If you're a lone man in a strange place, there's always a woman who'd give you a map of the local society happenings. Especially if she's a widow, one what takes interest in things going on, and old enough to feel flattered by a likely guy coming around. Mrs. Pig-Face, I call this one, not knowing her real name. I tell you, boy, the gazabo who started that crack about it being always 'the woman who pays' hadn't lived much south of the Mississippi jetties. Us men have their troubles, too.

"However, I got me several earfuls from that dame. Being heathen talk it mostly slopped over, but some sunk in. There's a 'Feast of Birds' coming soon. They set out things that these be-plastered parrots are partial to. Then the birds come and eat and waddle about with full belts and begin to spill out what's in their heads. I've seen humans act the same way, after a Legion banquet. Mostly, of course, it's just screeches—I'm talking of the parrots—but now and then comes a bit of Indian talk the birds have picked up while roosting round the villages. And, they being souls of dead relatives, what they say has a lot to do with Bugres manners and customs for the next few days— Though I guess three, four hours or so is about all that would interest us.

"Down in this neck of the woods it's the witch-doctor stuff is the king-pin. And

Quaguia's got that nailed. But there's a few young bucks as have seen the great world so much as a hundred miles away, and think friend Quaguia a bit *passé*. 'Flaming youth' stuff, you see, same as back in your college town. Quaguia, as I gathered from never mind who, would like to make himself solid by offering us two up as a Bugres holiday. Besides, we'd make real handsome ornaments for his parlor mantel, you and I, hanging side by side, dressed all in our birthday suits, scaled down to half size—"

Weatherbee struggled up on one elbow, his voice half cracking in his emotional need.

"And you knew that, and yet you came back—or never went away? I thought you knew—I thought you were going just to give me the chance. I can't make out if you're only a glorious fool, or—or—"

Caree's hand on his shoulder was like a cool balance, easing him back to a saner level.

"Steady on, fella; no use getting excited until we have to. Listen at this, will you. I'm twenty-seven years old, and'll never again be the man I was, but I've learned more than you don't know there is to know. And one of it is that there's a way out of every mess under the Milky Way—if you can only find it."

"Yes—*if*," Weatherbee whispered. "But suppose we don't find it?"

Caree's hand held its steadiness, but his voice turned suddenly grim.

"We'll keep those lily things of yours around a while. They might come in handy, at the last.

"Now," he said, "we'll eat. I got some thinking to do, and that takes a good half-gizzardful to do it on."

WEATHERBEE must have slept, for it was in that deadly hour before dawn that he found Caree shaking him.

"Wake up, fella," the other was saying. "Come to, and snap out of it. I got things to do," Caree went on, as he lighted a string of candle-nuts from the fire-hole. "I'll have to fix you as comfortable as I can, and you can do your sleeping daytimes. I'm going somewhere I don't want no one to see me go to—or come back from, either. So it's between dark and dawn that you and me will meet the next week or two. I'd give a pretty to know when that birdfest thing comes off. But that widow lady—real handsomely fixed she is, with a hammock, six calabashes, and three big buck sons all doing nicely in the poison dart and blow-pipe business. But she's kind of hazy on time, and I don't know whether it's days or whether it's weeks.

"Shuck that shirt," he added, "and I'll sponge you down. Come a few days and I can break that cast off of you. Then you'll be able to crawl a bit. I'll leave you some grub and then skin out. The tree-toads have quit, so the light's coming and I got to get where I want to be before anybody's stirring.

"There's some things I want to know," he went on. "And one of them's the Bugres word for 'go.' Us they call *Iga—Timi*, though I ain't hardly well acquainted enough with you to translate it. And besides, I don't see how they know. But 'go'—"

"*Chima*" Weatherbee put in. "I got it from the kids."

"And 'die' is *guapo*, which also means 'kill.' So now we're set."

"But what is it?" Weatherbee asked. "Can't you tell me what you're going to do?"

"I don't rightly know myself, yet; nor if it can be done. It just came as I was sitting by the fire—popped right at me, you might say, clear outa the flames. Dead asleep I must have gone, for I found myself jerking awake and saying, 'By cripes, *that's* it!' And now," Caree finished, gliding to the hanging palm fronds which served as a door, "I'm going to see if it is."

He turned, and, caught by a sudden desperation on Weatherbee's face, came swiftly back.

"What you got behind your eyebrows?" he demanded. "Are you thinking I'm quitting you? By all—" He stopped, seeking an oath sufficiently infernal "Listen, guy," he said, tapping the words with one finger into Weatherbee's chest. "I was born in Pike County, Mississippi. But may they turn me into a Republican if I don't come back to you, fella—if I can."

"But where are you going?" Weatherbee called.

Caree was gone, the palm fronds already clashing back into place behind him. Through their dry quiver the answer came, already faint with distance.

"To Appa-Tou."

THERE must have been a sliver of an old moon hanging somewhere above the jungle-top. Here and there a faint, eerie light seeped down through some rent in that canopy, sufficient to show a world of black and gray monstrous shapes. The lagoon lay like an expanse of liquid pitch, sending up a steam against the cooling night. Rolling his clothes into a bundle, Caree bound them on his head. He shivered as he thrust a tentative foot into the softly lapping water. It seemed impossible that flesh should come out from such blackness and still be white.

The water squashed horridly up between his toes. Overhead the plumed "water-arrows" rustled mysteriously. A hiss told of some *creebo* snake coiling among their arched stems. The whole world seemed sunk in that hour of deathlike sleep under the yellow blaze of the morning star. Its light, scattered across the lagoon, showed him the palm tufts of Appa-Tou. He quivered again as he thought of the quarter-mile swim. Electric eels, alligators, big turtles with snapping jaws—thank heaven the lagoon held no shoals of those little mackerel-like man-eating *piranyas!*

But there were other things, more vaguely dreaded because more unknown Sounds, coming only in the night, which often set them talking to each other, back in the shack, with mutual desperate cheerfulness. That noise, seldom heard, as if something were striking down on the lagoon's surface with a vast, flat tail many yards across. Or that extraordinary cry, far up in the tree clouds, like a tongueless human wailing formless words. Then again, there was The Stench. Only thrice had that come, but once was too much. Merely a smell, of course—one sniffed it at first, faint and far off, with a queer tightening around one's heart. Then it grew, filling the whole air—viscous, slightly sweetish, like the product of some half-putrescence. It was not that it was so bad; it was that it was so strange, so unlike anything else. It brought such a silence with it, too, as if all living things were seeking cover. Even the frogs ceased their clamor as it came. Then it would die away again, as if there had passed, unseen and unheard, some huge, incredible hold-over from some completely other world.

Small wonder that the Indians would never leave the circle of their fires after dark. That very fear of theirs made possible this undertaking—for one who, though shivering himself, could bring himself to face that fear.

This whole place was merely a dark hole on a spot still blank on the maps. Water-lily stems twined creepily about his shoulders; furtive things brushed against his stomach. But steadily the palm tufts rose against the stars. The islet was well under water. He would have to contrive some sort of staging on which to rest. A shelf, up among the big green fans where the parrots climbed and chattered as they fed on the hanging palm fruits.

Appa-Tou, the Place of Birds— Souls of dead ancestors— And himself, hanging day after day as in a cage, clinging to a thread of desperate hope—

IT WAS the tenth night and Weatherbee had news. Freed from his prisoning cast, he crawled about, dragging a still stiff and shrunken leg behind him. Caree crouched by the fire, spreading his sodden garments to dry. Rain drummed on the palm thatch and dripped relentlessly through. In the light of the candle-nuts his face showed worn, brooded on by the futility that comes from utter weariness.

"What's in your mind, fella?" he asked at last.

"Tomorrow—I had it from the kids—is the Bird Feast."

Caree pondered that, then stretched naked arms as if all he could compass was surrender.

"Well—I've done all I can, boy."

Weatherbee crawled closer, his eyes alight with feverish urgency.

"I know you have. And I believe you've done the trick—whatever it is you've done. Now, what I say is this. You've made it safe for me, you see. So why don't *you* clear out tonight? You can sneak down and get one of their canoes. With a feast tomorrow they won't notice it's gone. You'll go twice as quickly if you don't try to haul me along. Then, when you get down river, you can get some people and come back after me. If we both went they'd be after us, but if I'm here, probably they won't be so keen on going after you, and—"

"That'll do, brother," Caree put in quietly. "You've spoke your piece."

"But can't you see—"

Chin sunk on bare, up-drawn knees,

Caree looked long at Weatherbee. Soft stuff, the other had seemed down in Nickerie with his boyish trappings and frat-house airs. But that stuff was standing the furnace without cracking. Caree gave verdict.

"I guess maybe there's something to this college training, after all. Hang your game leg over the side and give me half the cot. I'm tired. As to tomorrow—there's still—"

THERE were still the lilies. That half said, wholly meant sentence was much with them that morning. Peering from the screening leaves at the clearing's edge, they watched the beginnings of the Bird Feast. A blaze of sky, crudely blue, above walls of raw green. Rows of Bugres, with their tawny bodies, their flat, cat faces under shocks of black hair. Old Quaguia, with toucan plumes bound about his head, stalking in ostentatious indifference to the mutterings of a few young bucks.

Then the parrots, first one, then three, then a cloud as they sensed the heaps of cracked-open palm nuts spread between the *ajoupas*.

Weatherbee dashed the moisture from his forehead. It was queer that sweat could be so cold. Caree, himself, both chained to the post of his still almost useless leg. The birds were beginning to mutter now, picking their way with full crops, uttering contented chuckles as they pecked at last choice bits.

Himself—Caree—hanging on the chance sounds from parrots' throats— Dolls. Shrunken, abhorrent dolls, hanging in Quaguia's hut. And as much as possible done while they were still alive. Well, at the last— He thrust his hand into a ragged pocket, fingering for comfort at a fragment from those lily bulbs.

The parrots were talking. He saw Quaguia quiver with astonishment. A jeering shout came from one of the younger bucks.

Fragments of that strange, yet human speech, falling in mechanical iteration from tongues which had no understanding of their meaning.

"*Iga-Timi chima—*"

Iga-Timi; that was themselves. And *chima* meant "go!"

"White men go," the parrots were saying. Then a gray-and-green bird, hanging head downward from an *ajoupa* ridge pole, screeched inhumanly—

"*Guapo Quaguia.*"

"Kill Quaguia."

Another shout went up at that. The old witch doctor raised his arms in attempt to recapture the moment, but a stinging dart from a blow-pipe struck and quivered in his foot. He leaped in the air with an unwary scream. The shout was laughter now. This was Bugres sport. Another moment and there was only a scuttling, squeaking old figure ringed about by tormentors frantic with delight.

TWO days and a night Caree and Weatherbee had urged that canoe down the rising flood of the Siparimi. Now, as they roused from prone exhaustion on a sand-bar, Weatherbee spoke that for which, as yet, there had been no time.

"Even now I don't quite see how you did it?"

"Who—me?" Caree asked, fumbling for lace bark and tobacco leaf. "Why, boy, it was just as simple.

"I just hauled me up into those palm trees," he nodded. "And there I'd sit, day in, day out, up among the parrots. And about fifty times an hour I'd call out; '*Iga-Timi chima*' I'd bawl, or maybe '*Guapo Quaguia*'— And hope to heaven those prohibited birds wouldn't get my language mixed.

"And that," he finished, "was absolutely all there was of it, fella."

NASSAU BOUND!

By HELEN VON KOLNITZ HYER

CHARLESTON, South Carolina—1863. Beyond range of the wary guns of the sand-hidden forts of Moultrie and Wagner the Federal fleet kept relentless watch upon the starving city. For months the blockade had been held inviolate; slowly the proud city by the sea was perishing for lack of the staple necessaries which could be had almost for the asking in the English colonies of Bermuda, the Bahamas and the Barbadoes, so tantalizingly out of reach.

* * *

Flickering flames from smoky lanterns lightened the shadowy spaces of a great storehouse where, in soft, blurred outlines of jute-bound cotton bales stacked in towering step-pyramids, lay more than half of the interned wealth of the beleaguered city. The *suck-suck-sucking* of water from below betrayed the wharf-piled foundations of the huge building, and a muffled *thump-thump* the presence of a long, low, rangy sailing craft which nuzzled the dock at her moorings alongside.

Under the coercion of a score of darkies, one of the huge pyramids was slowly disintegrating, as bale after bale of cotton was shouldered from the mass, hustled across the warehouse and lowered into the capacious hold of the waiting vessel.

A tense, stealthy silence hung over the working men. Only the soft thudding of the shifting cotton bales and an occasional whispered word of caution rose from the wet, slippery dockside and was lost in the crowding darkness of the starless sky.

At last the bales were all in place, the hatches battened down, the ropes cast loose. A lantern gleamed for an instant on an upturned face. From the dock came a whispered "God speed you safely through!" and the face, the vessel, and its precious cargo melted into the night.

"Can they win through the blockade?" questioned a strained voice in the clinging darkness of the warehouse.

"It is our only chance," came the reply. "A cargo of sugar, flour and the rest of the staple foods may save us. England is starving for our cotton. Her factories are closed, her mill hands idle. She has no work; we, no food. And a country's ransom of cotton in that warehouse. What a jest of fate!"

"How is your captain?"

"The best we could find. Knows every creek and cove, and current on the coast. If any one can elude the Federal fleet, he will."

"A month, you say—if he can reach Nassau?"

"Yes, just about a month."

* * *

Another cloudy, starless night. The same small group of men on the dock by the warehouse, straining their eyes across the dark. Presently a light that flashed and was gone—another and another light in swift succession—a pause— Then the scuffle of muffled oar-locks and once more the long, low, rangy sailing craft slid alongside of the dock. Recklessly the leader of the little band sprang onto her deck:

"Captain!" he cried. "Wonderful! Man, I'm proud of you. Twice! Through the whole Federal fleet!"

"Aye, sir, we did just that!"

"And you cleared the cargo?— What did you bring home—Sugar?—Flour?—Coffee?—"

"Cotton," answered the captain briefly.

"Cotton! By Jove, this is no time for jesting! We are in desperate straits for food."

The captain winced, then drew himself up with dignity:

"I took her out through the fleet as I said I would. I brought her back through the fleet as I said I would. For nearly a whole month I've sailed that blooming ocean looking for Nassau—and I couldn't find the —— place. I'm a pilot—not a navigator!"

For hide-bound temperaments

John Webb

suggests

Sea Cure

"WE GOT a new 'prentice boy," said old "Chips," the ship's carpenter.

"Yeah?" Cole Mace, A.B. seaman, showed scant interest. "Another tough kid?"

"Wal—" Old Chips considered. This new boy that the captain had signed on was a peculiar looking lad, and Chips wanted to do him justice. "He ain't never been to sea before, I guess. Didn't know which way to turn when he come aboard. Funny lookin' little squid with a scar across his nose. Hair black as tar. Eyes, too. He looks to me like one o' these here fellers from th'. hills—what d'ye call 'em? Hill-billies, yeh. Name o'—le's see. Heard th' mate say it. Bates, seems like—no, 'twasn't, either. Le's see, now—"

The garrulous old seaman became suddenly aware that Cole Mace was strangely attentive. He was leaning forward, hanging on every word.

"Seein' as ye're a hill-bill y'rself," went on Chips, "I thought maybe you might know this young 'un. What th' heck was thet name, durn it?"

"Was it Tate?" asked Cole Mace, his lips tightening a little.

"Tate! Yeah, thet's th' name! Ye know him, do ye?"

"In a way, Chips."

Cole got up with a little sigh. Yes, he knew Tate—Bud Tate, youngest of the clan. Bud was sure a hot-headed little devil to leave the Kentucky hills and come this far to carry on the feud.

The Tate-Mace feud. No one knew how the darn thing had started, but it had been going on for years. Cole Mace's grandpap had been killed, and then his father, and one brother had been crippled for life with a broken hip that refused to knit properly. And the Tates had suffered even worse than the Maces. Two brothers young Tate had lost, and an uncle, and last of all, his father.

Darn foolishness, feuds! What satisfaction did any one ever get out of all this killing? A Tate kills a Mace and then a Mace kills a Tate, and they start all over again, and all they had to show for it was a row of graves up there on the hill. And women who walked around stony-faced all day, as if they didn't care a darn; and cried all night. Why, it had got so up there around Lucasville that a man couldn't step out his door without somebody sniping him from the trees!

That was what caused Cole Mace to turn his back on the hills and go to sea. He was sick and tired of crawling around on his

belly in the bushes while the Tates blazed away at him with long-barreled squirrel-guns. Cole guessed he was the first man ever to leave the hills for the sea. Not one of the hill people in a hundred had ever seen the sea. Back there, the sea was thought of as a myth, and the occasional stranger who wandered in and talked of water so broad that you couldn't see across it was told to be on his way and stop trying to make fools of people.

So the Tate-Mace fight had driven Cole Mace from the hills. The Tates with their long guns and his own people with their contempt; they had scorned him because he wouldn't go out two or three times a week and bring back a couple of dead Tates for breakfast. They had called him a coward and said he wasn't any better than a —— Yankee. Twelve years had passed since he had first left the hills, and then, a year ago, he had made a mistake—he had gone back, thinking that maybe the darn fools had gotten some sense and stopped sniping one another.

But not they! They wouldn't even argue with him about it. You can't talk to a hillbilly. Their indifference to his logic had made Cole lose his head and he had offered to fight all the Maces and Tates in the hills if they'd fight sea style, with their fists. A half-dozen of his own people had taken him at his word, and though Cole had knocked two of them senseless and had mussed up the others so that they were ashamed to show themselves in town for a week afterward, they had finally got him down and thrown him out of the house.

And for the second time Cole Mace had put the hills behind him; this time, he vowed, for good. The day after he left, he had read in the paper that old Pap Tate had been found dead in the woods, and Cole Mace's sudden departure had been remarked on. The Tates, of course—and the Maces, too, between themselves—had said that Cole had killed Pap Tate and had run. And no doubt they still believed it. Well, let them! Cole didn't care. The world was too big, and too full of strange things to see and marvel at for Cole to worry about the things said about him by a lot of thick-headed billies in a back channel of Kentucky.

But now here was young Bud Tate—here, signed on as a member of the barkentine *Auriga's* crew. Um-umm! Cole sighed as he left old Chips and made his way up on forecastle-head. The barkentine had been a week in Wilmington, North Carolina, loading

cotton for Bordeaux, and was sailing within an hour. Already the pilot was aboard and there was a tug waiting to take their line and head down the Cape Fear River to the sea.

The mate's watch were standing by on the forecastle-head. And with them was young Bud Tate, a lean, wiry boy with hot eyes and a stubborn mouth. He saw Cole Mace coming and turned to meet him.

"H'lo, Bud," said Cole. He had decided to make no mention of the feud and act as if it didn't exist. "How come you thought o' goin' to sea?"

Young Bud said nothing; he just stood there and looked at Cole. Cole was taller, older and in all ways just the opposite of Bud. Cole was blond and good-natured and laughing, a good rough-and-tumble fighter who scorned any sort of weapon. Bud had cut his teeth on a squirrel gun, so to speak.

Bud's black eyes smoldered hotly. He had come a long way to meet Cole Mace—a long way for a hill boy, that is. Never before in his life had Bud been over twenty miles from home. To reach Wilmington had been a herculean feat. He had walked, ridden freight trains and hung to the backs of automobiles. He had nearly starved, and had he not been so intent on his objective, the surprizing largeness of the world would have bewildered him.

But Bud didn't say anything of all this; he said nothing at all. He just stood there, looking at the hated Mace whom he had traveled so far to come up with. Then, without the slightest warning, he reached under his coat and snatched from his waistband a long old-fashioned revolver. His eyes burst into flame as he leveled the weapon at Cole's stomach and pulled the trigger.

Plup! That was all. The cartridge was too old, or perhaps damp. Bud's thumb hooked over the big hammer to cock it for another shot.

But Cole was too quick. He knocked the weapon from Bud's hand and the chief mate, Mr. Springer, a leathery old seaman, snatched it up from the deck.

"Here, now!" cried the mate. "Hey, hey! What d'ye mean by tryin' to shoot somebody? Kid like you runnin' around with a gun in his belt! What, what?"

Bud remained silent, his thin face expressionless. But inside he was boiling. He was sixteen years old—a man, he told himself—and he had failed, made a fool of himself. How the Maces would laugh when they heard! Trying to kill a man with a pistol that only went *plup!*

"S'ye won't talk, hey?" The mate swung on Cole. "What did he try to shoot ye fer?"

"Oh—" Cole stumbled. How could he explain? How could he explain the psychology of hill feudism to Mr. Springer, a seaman? It couldn't be done. The cold-blooded killing of an unarmed man—could Mr. Springer understand that?

"It's just somethin' between me an' him," said Cole. "Ain't got nothin' to do with the ship, sir."

"Oh, it ain't, hey? Murder ain't got nothin' to do with the ship, hey? Who tole ye thet?" He turned to Bud. "If we was at sea, young 'un, I'd hang ye up by th' thumbs. Heh! What kind of a man are ye, anyhow? Get below an' stay there till we get out to sea, then I'll take ye to the cap'n— A'right, bullies! Cast off that breast line! Let go on th' dock! Haul in! Tail on, bullies—walk away with it!"

The tug's propeller churned up yellow mud from the river bottom; the tow line leaped and tautened, stretched out to half again its size; the *Auriga* swung and headed seaward.

CAPTAIN FOLEY got no more out of Bud Tate than the mate had. His face set like rock, his mouth a thin, tight line, the boy stood sullen and silent while the captain raged and threatened. At last the captain gave up and sent the boy forward with a warning of what would happen to him should he do any such thing again. The pistol was locked up in the captain's desk.

The warning made absolutely no impression on Bud. He had one aim in life now—to kill Cole Mace. What then happened to himself was of no consequence. Bud's grandpap had stood up in a Kentucky court and shot dead an enemy being tried for murder. The Tates were a breed that did not worry about consequences. Bud was a Tate to the bone.

Cole Mace found him brooding alone on the forecastle-head that night. A stiff wind had come out of the south and the *Auriga* was foaming along with the wind abeam, under all plain sail.

"Listen, Bud," said Cole, "can't we kind o' call this thing off? What's the use o' you an' me fightin' about somethin' that happened way back when I was a little kid an' you wasn't born yet?"

No answer.

"You don't even know what started it, do you? There ain't no sense in fightin' over somethin' somebody else did to somebody else, Bud. If you just want to fight, do it with your fists, and when it's over, forget it. Ain't no sense in holdin' a grudge all your life."

Still no answer. Cole was losing heart. He knew he could never make Bud see things the way he saw them. Bud could never understand how two men could fight like wildcats, knocking each other all over the deck, and then, a half-hour later, link arms and go ashore together.

"Come on, Bud, let's forget it."

Bud stirred.

"Yo' killed Pap," he said tonelessly.

"I didn't," said Cole quickly. "I heard about that after I left. Pap Tate killed himself."

"Yo' set a deadfall fer him."

"He set it himself, for a bear. I was trompin' along an' I seen Pap down below, by the crick, an' all of a sudden he seen me and grabs up his gun. Then I run."

"Run!" said Bud contemptuously.

"Sure I run. I didn't have no gun an' I'd 'a' run if I did have one. I didn't wanta kill Pap, an' I didn't want him to kill me, so I run. Then he comes scramblin' up the crick bank an' I guess he must 'a' started a slide, 'cause I heard rocks an' dirt fallin'. I guess he slid down and tripped the deadfall himself. I didn't know anything about it till I read it in the paper next day or I'd 'a' gone back an' got him out."

"Humph!" murmured Bud. He didn't believe the story and didn't want to believe it.

"Well, maybe you'll get over it," said Cole. "I don't blame you for bein' like you are any more'n I'd blame a Chinee for havin' a pigtail. An' I ain't goin' get sore at you no matter what you do, either. An' I won't let anybody else get sore at you an' knock you aroun', either. If anybody bothers you, just you let me know."

"Yo' —— Yankee!" snorted Bud, which was the most contemptuous expression he knew.

"I ain't got nothin' more to say, Bud. Just you think it over, an' maybe you'n me'll be friends yet."

He went off, leaving Bud staring unseeingly into the night. The boy was telling himself that there was plenty of time. He'd get Cole, and get him right. No hurry.

All that night the wind held strong and true, and the ship made good time. When Bud looked around the next morning he was filled with amazement. So it was true! There was water so wide you couldn't see across it! It was hard to believe even with the evidence right here before his eyes. He kept looking over the bow expecting to see this place called France at any minute.

It was funny, all right, all this water. And some people said the world was round. But no—that was too much to believe.

"A'right, young 'un!" It was the boatswain, Darby Mullins, a great black-bearded man with one eye. "Tail on this line with th' rest o' th' lads. No sojerin'."

The men didn't know how to act toward Bud, the new apprentice boy. He didn't fit in. And no one could possibly have known less about ships and the sea. With an ordinary boy they would have known what to do; they would have given him a boot every now and then to keep him in his place, and would have kept after him till he knew the ropes and was of some use, but Cole Mace had passed the word around that Bud wasn't to be treated too roughly, and the rest thought that if Cole stood up for the boy he must be all right. Besides, Cole was a bad man to tangle with.

"This young 'un looks like a bad 'un to me," commented "Dutch" Schligel, a big-boned Hollander. "Got a bad eye, like thet —— Indian."

The Indian was 'Cardo, a seaman who was part Carib and part Spanish. A dangerous man, 'Cardo, and not liked by the others of the crew. He was too quick to use a knife, and in one way he was indeed like young Bud Tate—he never forgot nor forgave an insult or an injury. Also, he was silent and sullen. He was a big man, smooth-muscled and like a cat on his feet. There were few aboard the ship willing to cross 'Cardo the Red Carib without mighty good reason. Like Bud, he kept as much as possible to himself, and they let him alone.

The wind freshened that day and the fore royal, topgallant and flying jib were taken in. Later on a reef was put in the square foresail and the fore-and-aft mainsail and

mizzen. The wind hauled into the east and then to the northeast, and the barkentine was put on the port tack. Captain Foley paced the poop with an anxious expression on his face.

At midnight both watches were called to put the ship before the wind. With her square fore-canvas she handled better before the wind than on it, and the cargo must be kept dry at any cost. The wind had risen to a full gale, roaring and screaming over the tumbled ocean. Great seas thundered over the ship and swept her from stem to stern, and the captain was afraid for his hatch tarps, which were far from new.

"In foretops'l!" shouted the captain, and the mate and the boatswain passed the order along to the men hanging on in the lee of the midship deckhouse.

Young Bud Tate was as if he had been suddenly plunged into another world. He was confused, and couldn't make head nor tail of what the men were trying to do. Men running this way and that; shouted orders that meant nothing to him; sails coming down on the run, with a screech of blocks and gear; tackles and lines being dragged over the wet, heaving decks; men scrambling aloft like monkeys and disappearing in the rigging. Men dashed out of the darkness, threw a line off a cleat and dashed away again. All about him in the roaring darkness things were happening, and the crew were to him dark fleeting shadows that ran and shouted and leaped and clung. He was thrust forward and a line put in his hands, and a great voice bellowed:

"Heave away, bullies! Lay back, you farmers! Yee-oooh! Yee-oooh! Once more —once more—once more! Yee-oooh! 'Vast! Take a turn, Cole! Good lad! Swig 'er off now! Once more! Now aloft, bullies! Frappin' lines! Jump, you brass-bound wahoos!"

Up they went, into the shrouds and up into the towering rigging. Bud, being green, should have stayed below, but he didn't. He swung into the shrouds and scrambled up, falling, slipping, missing his hold of the ratlines, but somehow always catching himself at the last instant.

Into the futtock shrouds. A big man was ahead of him and Bud followed as best he could. Out on the leaping, jerking topsail yard a lean tapering spar that bent like a carriage whip. Bud somehow got his feet in the foot-ropes, threw himself forward to get his arms about the yard—and then slipped and pitched backward, his arms flailing for something to grasp.

And then a strong hand gripped him by the wrist and he swung in an arc as the ship rolled and dived.

"Grab the foot-rope, Bud," shouted a familiar voice.

"Let go!" screamed Bud. Imagine it—a Mace saving the life of a Tate! And imagine a Tate allowing it! "Let go, yo' —— Yankee!"

"Like —— I will!" returned Cole. He laughed, even though his own life was in great danger as he held on with one hand and clung to Bud with the other.

"Now, Bud, grab!"

He heaved mightily and flung Bud like a sack of grain over the foot-rope. The boy's hands gripped like a vise and he wrapped both legs around it. Cole clutched him again and lifted him so he could hang on to the yard itself.

Bud's brain was whirling; he was sick and weak. He merely held on, both arms clamped about the quivering, jerking spar, while the others who had come aloft passed frapping lines. At last Bud got a purchase on himself and worked slowly in to the mast and thence to the deck.

"Ye'll learn, son," called Dutch Schligel as he dropped beside Bud and pushed the boy into the lee of the deckhouse as a sea thundered over and roared forward.

Bud clung to the deckhouse handrail and said nothing. The tumult within his brain was as fierce as that of the storm. Saved by a Mace! Shame upon shame! Now Cole Mace would have to die!

The wind hauled to the northward and for four days drove the barkentine, under triple-reefed mainsail and storm staysails, before it, into the south. Then, slowly, the gale lessened.

The *Auriga* staggered into the lee of Eletheura Island and came to anchor. The rigging would have to be stayed up, many deck seams calked, a new fore topgallant set and much new running gear rove off. The tired men turned to putting the battle-scarred barkentine in shape again.

That night Bud was put on anchor watch. The wind had died to a gentle tropic breeze. He paced the forecastle-head beneath a million stars, thinking, turning things over and over.

Cole Mace must die! He had killed Pap!

Bud did not doubt that in the least. Cole was a liar, Bud told himself over and over. Not that Bud was personally angry with Cole for killing Pap; it was merely a score that must be wiped out. The fact that Cole had saved Bud's life only made it worse.

But how was he to kill Cole? He had no gun. He couldn't do it with his hands; in a rough-and-tumble Cole could whip a half-dozen like Bud. Bud wasn't even sure that he could kill Cole with a knife, unless he took Cole by surprize and struck true and hard.

Bud had stolen a knife from one of the men, and now it was in his waistband beneath his cotton shirt. He took it from its leather sheath and looked at it—a wicked weapon, long and bright and sharp. He felt the edge.

But was it right to kill a man with a knife? What did the feudist code say about killing an enemy with a knife? Bud puzzled over it. Must the killing be done with a gun? He didn't see why. The way he looked at it now, it seemed to him that the idea was to kill, no matter how. A knife, then, was as good a way as any other.

He held the handle of the knife in his palm and slipped the long blade up his sleeve. Then he went down the ladder to the waist and entered the small forecastle.

No one awake. Exhausted, dirty men slept in double-tiered bunks that ran along both sides of the triangular compartment. Clothing swung from pegs as the ship rolled gently. Oilskins scraped softly. A man tossed and muttered, his nerves still leaping and straining from the battle of the last four days. Another man groaned in his sleep with the pain of three broken ribs.

Hard-working, hard-living, reckless men, each an unsung hero; but they meant nothing to young Bud Tate, standing there in the semi-darkness with a knife up his sleeve.

Stepping softly, he found Cole's bunk. Cole lay on his back, one arm half over the side of the bunk, his great chest bared and his blond hair all gummy with sea salt. He slept noiselessly, like a tired child.

Another thing—what did the code say about killing a sleeping man? Bud wanted to do what was right. Well, why not? What was the difference between killing a man who was asleep and shooting a man in the back from ambush?

"Ah cain't see no diff'runce," he thought. No difference. Well, then—

He raised the knife.

"Ah'll stick him in th' stomick," he decided. Then he would try to escape from the ship. But no matter about that; this job at hand was the big thing, and what came after was of little importance. He'd better hurry, too; some one might wake up.

But why didn't he strike? He lowered his hand and raised it again. He tensed and strained. But he didn't strike.

He couldn't! His hand wouldn't obey. Fingers like steel held his wrist—invisible fingers. His heart pounded and his head rang and he strained to overcome the thing that was holding him back.

But he couldn't overcome it. At length he threw the knife out the open door at an angle, and followed it at a stumbling run. The knife splashed into the sea. Bud climbed again to the forecastle-head and stared out over the star-tracked water.

Another failure!

Three times it had been proven to him that he was not a man! Wasn't a Tate! He strode to and fro, cursing, gnawing at his lips till they bled.

But he wasn't finished yet, he told himself. To him, the end was not in doubt; it was only the means that eluded him. And he had not yet reached a solution when the port watch apprentice relieved him at midnight.

JUST before noon the next day, Bud was working near the galley when the negro cook put out his head and grinned widely.

"H'lo, Gawgia boy!"

"Ah ain't no Gawgia boy," retorted Bud. "Ah'm from Kaintucky."

"Jes' th' same thing," argued the cook.

He drew back, and a few seconds later a long black arm appeared holding out a piece of pork and a chunk of bread.

"Here yo are, Kaintuck. Here's somepin' what'll stick to yo ribs."

Eagerly Bud took the pork and the bread. His mouth was open and the pork between his teeth when a big hand reached over his shoulder and snatched away both pork and bread.

"Ees too good for leetle boy," said a soft voice, and Bud swung about, his teeth still parted and an anticipatory taste still in his mouth. He was still surprize-bound as the meat and bread disappeared in the capacious mouth of 'Cardo the Carib.

"Ees good," murmured 'Cardo, coolly

wiping his fingers on his dirty blue shirt.

And then at 'Cardo's side appeared Cole Mace. Bud, suddenly furious, leaped at 'Cardo, but Cole caught him and pushed him back. Then Cole smashed 'Cardo in the mouth and sent him spinning to the bulwark.

Men came running—the two mates and the boatswain. 'Cardo had crouched and was snarling deep in his throat. He plunged toward Cole, but the two mates caught him and thrust him roughly back against the bulwark.

"None o' that!" cried Mr. Springer. "This is workin' time. Fight all ye wanta, but do it on y'r own time—not th' ship's. D'ye hear me—heh, heh?"

'Cardo looked past the mate at Cole Mace, waiting coolly.

"We fight tonight, eh?" he said softly.

"Any time suits me," returned Cole, and added, "An' with anything—knives, marl'n-spikes or feather-dusters."

"No knives!" cut in Mr. Springer. "If either of ye flashes a knife I'll string ye up by th' thumbs. D'ye hear—heh?"

"Turn to, you sojers!" roared the boatswain, and the men returned to their work.

"Ah didn't ask yo' to interfere," said Bud hotly to Cole.

"I know you didn't, Bud. I didn't hit him on'y because o' him swipin' that pork. That greaser an' me've been gettin' set to tangle for a long time. He's been pushin' me for months an' I'm about sick of it. This is my chance to finish him up an' have it over with. Jus' you watch me muss him up."

Bud shook with fury. He didn't want anybody to take his part. Particularly not a Mace! He would rather be beaten to a pulp than have a Mace lift a finger to help him.

And why couldn't Cole Mace understand that they were deadly enemies? Under no circumstances, Bud told himself, would he help Cole, and here was Cole continually on the lookout to help him in one way and another. Just like a —— Mace! Mean and low-down clear through!

DARBY MULLINS, the boatswain, was a shrewd one. Cole and 'Cardo were valuable men, and Darby didn't want them laid up with broken arms or ribs, while other men did their work. Darby thought of the ship's welfare first, last and all the time.

So Darby thought of a plan whereby the two could fight out their grudge and punish each other all they wanted without either's being disabled. Of course, after such a fight as Darby had in mind a man would be stiff and sore and parts of him might look like raw beef, and he wouldn't sleep so well for a week or so, but he could still pulley-haul and stand watches, which was all Darby cared about. It was an old-time device and, besides Darby, only two men of all the crew had ever heard of it; one was Mr. Springer, the mate, and the other, old Chips. They both approved. "That'll take th' starch out of 'em," said Mr. Springer, and Chips agreed. As for the captain, he didn't care how or why the men fought, as long as they didn't use dangerous weapons.

Immediately after supper Bud Tate left the forecastle and went above, to sulk and fume alone. The sun was still high and the water beneath the ship was as clear as crystal. About fifteen feet of the starboard bulwark had been stove in during the storm and hemp life-lines had been stretched in its place. Bud hung over the life-lines and gazed down into the sparkling water. He could see the bottom plainly—sand, shell, here and there a bit of green weed, and directly under the ship, for there was neither wind nor tide, he saw the big stock-and-ball anchor lying with one black fluke wedged tightly under a clump of coral.

A fathom or so down, two great fish hung motionless in the wavering green water. One was about ten feet long and the other was slightly shorter. They were slender fish, with long, lean dog-like jaws and vicious little eyes. They had been hovering beneath the ship all afternoon and Mr. Springer had pointed them out to the men.

"Them? Don't ye know what them are? Them're barracuda, th' fiercest fish thet swims. One barracuda'll whip six sharks twice his size. Ain't afeered o' nothin', an' they're allus hungry. They go so fast ye can't see nothin' but a streak, an' they can rip y'r stomick open before ye can wink. If one o' ye'd fall overboard they'd rip ye open an' tear y'r arms an' legs off an' gobble ye up in half a second. Anybody wanta go in swimmin'?"

Nobody had.

Bud shivered as he turned away. It made him sick to think what would happen to him should he slip and fall through the

life-lines. Rip—slash—gobble! And no more Bud Tate!

"Whew!" he breathed shakily, and moved still farther from the life-lines.

Gruff voices rose from below as the men came from the forecastle. Cole Mace's full voice rose above them all—

"You know a lot, don't you, Dutch? You can tell Bud's no good jus' by lookin' at him, can't you?"

"Well, lookit what he tried to do with that gun, day we shoved off from Wilmin't'n—"

"That's somethin' you don't know anything about, an' I couldn't make you understand it in a million years. Anyhow, that's b'tween Bud an' me, so don't you go blatherin' about it."

Then they came up the ladder to the forecastle-head. Darby Mullins was in the lead and after him came Cole, with 'Cardo close behind. Dutch and the others of the forecastle gang followed closely, talking excitedly. The two mates came from aft and Captain Farley watched from the poop.

Dutch swung up to Bud and whispered hoarsely:

"Ye cold-hearted little animule, d'ye see what ye done? See what ye got Cole into? He can't lick 'Cardo. An' ye don't give a durn, do ye?"

"No," returned Bud promptly.

The bony seaman's anger swelled and he seemed about to drive his fist to the boy's face when Cole shouted quickly—

"Let him alone, Dutch! Hurt him an' I'll muss you up when I finish with this big greaser."

'Cardo, his mouth drawn out in a lean, cruel smile, purred like a cat. The men growled and cast angry looks at the sullen boy. To a man they wanted Cole to win the coming fight, for they all liked him, but though they knew he was a tough, hard fighter, they did not think he had a chance with the giant Carib.

Darby Mullins took charge of matters. He had in his hand two half-fathom lengths of quarter-inch wire, each whipped with sail-twine so that the strands would not unlay. He motioned the two men together.

"Get y'r shirts off, you two."

One yank and Cole was stripped to the waist. He stood there confidently, a deep-chested man, his shoulders, back and stomach packed with rope-like muscles, his skin, save at throat and wrists, the color of rich milk. His shock of straw-colored hair fell down over his forehead as he bent to tie additional knots in his shoes. Then he straightened and grinned—grinned in 'Cardo's face.

"Where's y'r knife, 'Cardo?" demanded Darby.

"Ees b'low in bunk."

He stripped to the waist slowly, with terrible grimness in every movement. He was at least two inches taller than Cole, and thicker and broader. The skin of his body was of the same reddish bronze as his face, and it glistened in the sunlight as if it were burnished. His muscles were round, smooth, sinuous; they writhed under his skin like coiling snakes.

Bud looked on with his face expressionless save for a faint scorn in his eyes. This sort of fighting didn't settle anything. A bullet was different; you put a slug into a Mace and he didn't bother you any more. Of course another Mace would then take up his gun and start out to put a slug in a Tate, and then another Tate would— But this line of logic was paralleling Cole's reasoning too closely, and he angrily tilted the subject from his mind and turned his attention to the two big men preparing to fight.

Cole tightened his belt and grinned—a thoughtful grin; Cole was working out something in his mind. 'Cardo fingered the broad red sash about his waist and glided forward, silent and outwardly cold, his heavy lids masking the blood lust in his eyes. He had been struck, and by a —— gringo, and his Spanish-Carib blood demanded vengeance.

"Hold out y'r port wings," directed Darby Mullins.

They held out their left arms and Darby, with a fathom or so of six-thread manila which old Chips tossed him, lashed the two forearms, the milk-white one and the bronze one, together so that they were inside to inside, with each hand gripping an elbow. Two magnificent men they were, but now that they stood close together the giant bronze man seemed to tower over the blond gringo. The watching seamen grumbled and shook their heads as they compared them, but Cole merely smiled up at the giant and nodded as if he had decided upon something. Cole cast Bud a glance that said as plain as words:

"Watch this, Bud. Just watch!"

Darby held out the two half-fathom

lengths of wire and each took one without looking. Cole swished his cat through the air, and it hissed wickedly, like an angry snake. 'Cardo stood motionless, his big, smooth body relaxed, the wire cat hanging limply from his big hand. For a moment their eyes met and held, each gaging the other. 'Cardo's thin lips drew back and his big white teeth glistened. His nostrils quivered. Cole's grin hardened and his body tensed; he scraped his feet on the deck and braced himself.

It suddenly sank into Bud's mind that this was grim, relentless business. One of these men must quit, must grovel before the other. It must be fought out to a finish, and at the end one would be a beaten, broken man. Which one?

Surely not 'Cardo; he was too strong, too hard, a man of iron, and of the proud breed that prefers death to defeat. No, 'Cardo wouldn't quit. By fair means or foul, he would win.

Cole, then? Would fine, clean, good-natured Cole be beaten to the deck? It looked so. But would he quit? No, not while he could move a finger— There! ——! Bud cursed. Cole was a hated enemy, and a cowardly renegade besides; was he—Bud—softening? Never! He gritted his teeth and mouthed silent curses upon the hated Mace.

"The'll be no hittin' in th' face," Darby was telling them, "an' no kicking or bitin' or anything like thet? Savvy?"

They nodded and both drew back to strike with their cats. With their left arms bound together and their left sides toward each other, each man's back was a broad target for the other. The little crowd of seamen formed a tense circle about them. Bud, to his disgust, found himself trembling a little as he watched from beside the bony Dutch, who was grumbling and growling that 'Cardo weighed forty pounds more than Cole and was much stronger, and it wasn't fair.

"Turn to!" roared the boatswain through his matted black beard, and the strange fight was on.

And strange it was! Stranger than any had foreseen. They all knew that Cole Mace was a tough customer in a fight, but none had credited him with being also a strategist. He had a keen fighting brain and while waiting for the word to begin had planned a course of action which took them all by surprize—particularly 'Cardo the Carib.

To 'Cardo it had seemed merely a case of standing there and slashing away till the man before him succumbed, but Cole had reasoned farther than that. Why, he had asked himself, should he fight with only one arm? Why not use his other arm as well, and his legs, his shoulders, his whole body, as long as he kept within the rules as given by Darby Mullins?

So it was that when 'Cardo, his snake-like muscles leaping into action, struck like a flash of light, he found himself jerked forward by his left arm, bound fast to Cole's, and he missed clean. And Cole's wire cat whistled through the air and cut deep into the Carib's broad bronze back. When the cat leaped away it ripped flesh with it and blood bubbled out. Then 'Cardo was twisted about, thrust back off his balance—and again the vicious cat slashed across his back. Cole had taken the aggressive at the start and was fighting like a wildcat to hold it. He had got the jump on the bigger, stronger man.

So it went. 'Cardo was jerked forward, thrust backward, twisted this way and that, kept continually off his balance. He couldn't get set. And without a pause that cruel cat was hissing at him, coming from all angles, crisscrossing, slicing his back to ribbons. He was being literally flayed alive. Try as he would, not once could he set himself to deliver a really punishing blow across the fair back of the blond young demon who was laughing as he fought. Cole was too quick; his splendid muscles were too well coordinated with his keen brain and his sense of equilibrium was too great for 'Cardo to have a chance.

Bud forgot everything but what was happening here before him. He knew only that Cole Mace was cutting 'Cardo the Carib to ribbons. He knew that the blood that was pouring from that bronze back, that spattered both men alike and flew from that hissing wire cat and sprinkled the circle of breathless seamen, that lay as slippery as grease on the yellow pine planks—he knew that this blood was not Cole Mace's. And he knew by the agonized, frantic expression upon 'Cardo's face that he was taking terrible punishment and was desperate. And Cole, though he had not escaped entirely unscathed, was fighting as strongly as ever.

Bud opened his mouth to shout—to shout with exultation!—but his heart leaped into his throat and his cry trailed off into a thin, weak squeak—for Cole had slipped on the red deck and was off his balance. And before he could regain it 'Cardo lashed him twice across the face.

"Lay off that!" bellowed Darby. "No hittin' in th' face!"

He leaped in, but Cole shoved him back. Then, crossing his right arm over his bound left, Cole drove his fist with terrible force to 'Cardo's jaw.

'Cardo staggered, dazed; his eyes glazed. Then he recovered and bent low. He tossed his wire cat to one side. Cole waited, thinking that 'Cardo was about to call enough.

'Cardo's breath whistled from between tightly clenched teeth. His right hand streaked to the red sash about his waist. A steel blade flashed in the sunlight.

Cole threw himself to one side, dragging the giant with him. They went down, each trying to twist so as to use his right hand. They rolled over and over and brought up in the waterway by the stove-in bulwark. There sounded a sharp crack, and as they both struggled to their feet Bud saw that 'Cardo's right arm swung limp and twisted —broken. The long knife clinked to the deck.

For a dreadful moment they swayed there, half over the water—and over the hungry barracudas hovering below. The top life-line strained as the two big bodies pressed it outboard.

'Cardo's eyes were boiling pools of venom now. He was beaten, done. Nothing would wipe that out but the very thing that Bud Tate had vowed to take—Cole Mace's life.

A dozen men had leaped to pull them back, but before any could reach them 'Cardo plunged out, parting the hemp life-line and pulling his enemy with him.

Still lashed arm to arm, they turned completely over once and struck the water, went down, down till they twisted about the anchor chain. Bud, looking down through the clear water, saw 'Cardo clamp his great legs about the chain and hang on; saw Cole struggle to free his arm, but the nine-thread manila and the expertly tied reef-knots defied him. Then Cole ceased trying to free his arm and heaved with all his enormous strength to break the crazed Carib's scissors-hold of the anchor chain. The two barracudas, momentarily startled and puzzled by the splash and the flurry of arms and legs, had darted a little way off, then had turned. Now they were coming slowly back, peering with their sharp little eyes, trying to make out the strange creatures who had invaded their element. In another moment they would flash forward with their needlelike teeth.

Darby Mullins had kicked off his shoes to go over, but when he saw the two long fish his face blanched and he changed his mind.

"Capst'n bars!" roared Mr. Springer. "Heave in th' chain! Bring 'em up! Heave round, bullies!"

Bars were thrust into the capstan-head and the slack of the chain came clanking over the wildcat. Then they saw that the anchor was fast beneath the clump of coral and it was instantly plain that sail would have to be put on the ship and the anchor turned over before it could be broken out. Long before that could be done Cole Mace and 'Cardo the Carib would be quite dead; in fact they would be dead in a very few seconds—as soon as those two killers of the sea got over their puzzlement.

Cole was still struggling heroically and coolly, but futilely, and he was weakening fast. 'Cardo, his eyes closed, held on grimly with his leg-scissors about the chain. He paid not the slightest attention to the fist beating upon his face nor to the knees that drove into his stomach. He was awaiting death—inviting it. And indeed, it was at his elbow.

Bud, leaning far out over the water, shook with a spasm of trembling. Then he snatched up 'Cardo's knife from the deck and dived clean. The men left the capstan and ran to the side of the ship.

They saw Bud reach the two big forms twisted grotesquely about the anchor chain. He slashed with his knife at the seizings that bound their two arms together, the speed of his action churning the water into froth and bubbles. Then he kicked away from the chain with one hand twisted tightly in the waistband of Cole's trousers. And at the same instant the two big fish, afraid that their meal was escaping, shot forward like two torpedoes. There was a swift flurry that beat the water in opaque foam.

Then the water turned red.

"Heavin'-lines!" shouted the mate. "Jump!"

Two heads bobbed out of the water. Lines snaked out from the *Auriga's* deck. A hand caught one, made it fast.

"Run away with it!" bellowed Darby Mullins. "Tail on, everybody! Yeee—ooooh!"

The men caught up the line and ran across the deck, treading on one anothers heels in their eagerness.

" 'Vast! Little more! Walk back!"

A man lifted over the side. It was Cole Mace, unconscious. The men leaped to another line which the mate had tossed over.

"Walk away!"

Another man came bumping up the ship's side.

"Who is it?" rumbled Dutch Schligel. "If it's that big spiggoty we'll chuck him back!"

"It ain't," answered Darby. "It's little Bud. And don't hurt him or I'll crack y'r skulls!"

Hurt him? They lifted him as gently as if he were glass, and placed him on deck. Darby Mullins held his head. A villainous looking old seaman shielded him from the glare of the setting sun. Dutch Schligel fell to chafing his wrists with his sandpaper palms. Mr. Springer, peering overside into the clearing water, said that 'Cardo was no more.

"Lemme 'lone," protested Bud, sitting up. "Lemme 'lone, Ah tell yo'."

He coughed out a little sob.

"How's—how's—"

"He's a'right," answered Darby. "Cole's a'right, on'y he drunk a little too much sea water. He'll come out of it in a minute."

Cole did come out of it. He pushed away the men who were working on him and sat up weakly. He grinned crookedly to Bud.

"H'lo, Bud! How's things, old-timer?"

Bud stared at him. His black eyes hardened. The old hill hatred was creeping back on him again.

But he thrust it away. He smiled.

"Every thing's a'right, Cole," he said stumblingly. "How—is it—with yo'?"

AN ADVERTISEMENT BY WASHINGTON

By A. L. BUDLONG

THERE is in my possession a copy of No. 1, Vol. 1, of the "Maryland *Journal* and the Baltimore *Advertiser* (containing the Freshest Advices, both Foreign and Domestic)," which has as one of its most interesting items a land advertisement by George Washington, reproduced below. The ad is interesting from several standpoints: first, it shows that the father of our country was quite adept in "talking up" his product; the Potomac River is referred to as the "Potowmack"—a spelling which many writers of the present day overlook when laying their novels in the Revolutionary or immediate pre-Revolutionary period; and there is also contained a reference to the "new government" which it was proposed establishing on the Ohio.

"Mount Vernon, Va.
July 15, 1773.

"The Subscriber having obtained Patents for upward of TWENTY THOUSAND Acres of LAND on the *Ohio* and *Great Kanhawa* (Ten Thousand of which are situated on the banks of the first-mentioned river, between the mouths of the two *Kanhawas*, and the remainder on the *Great Kanhawa*, or *New River*, from the mouth, or near it, upward, in one continued survey) proposes to divide the same into any-sized tenements that may be desired, and lease them upon moderate terms, allowing a reasonable number of years rent free, provided, within the space of two years from next October, three acres for every fifty contained in each lot, and proportionately for a lesser quantity, shall be cleared, fenced and tilled; and that, by or before the time limited for the commencement of the first rent, five acres for every hundred, and proportionately, as above, shall be enclosed and laid down in good grass for meadow; and moreover, that at least fifty good fruit trees for every like quantity of land shall be planted on the premises. Any persons inclinable to settle on these lands may be more fully informed of the terms by applying to the subscriber, near *Alexandria*, or in his absence, to Mr. LUND WASHINGTON; and would do well in communicating their intentions before the 1st of October next, in order that a sufficient number of lots may be laid off to answer the demand.

"As these lands are among the first which have been surveyed in the part of the country they lie in, it is almost needless to premise that none can exceed them in luxuriance of soil, or convenience of situation, all of them lying upon the banks either of the *Ohio* or *Kanhawa*, and abounding with fine fish and wild fowl of various kinds, as also in most excellent meadows, many of which (by the bountiful hand of Nature) are, in their present state, almost fit for the scythe. From every part of these lands water carriage is now had to *Fort Pitt*, by an easy communication; and from *Fort Pitt*, up the *Monongahela*, to *Redstone*, vessels of convenient burthen, may and do pass continually; from whence, by means of *Cheat River*, and other navigable branches of the *Monongahela*, it is thought the portage to *Potowmack* may, and will, be reduced within the compass of a few miles, to the great ease and convenience of the settlers in transporting the produce of their lands to market. To which may be added, that as patents have now actually passed the seals for the several tracts here offered to (be) leased, settlers on them may cultivate and enjoy the lands in peace and surety, notwithstanding the unsettled counsels respecting a new colony on the *Ohio;* and as no right money is to be paid for these lands, and quitrent of two shillings sterling a hundred, demandable some years hence only, it is highly presumable that they will always be held upon a more desirable footing than where both these are laid on with a very heavy hand. And it may not be amiss further to observe, that if the scheme for establishing a new government on the *Ohio*, in the manner talked of, should ever be effected, these must be among the most valuable lands in it, not only on account of the goodness of soil, and the other advantages above enumerated, but from their contiguity to the seat of government, which more than probable will be fixed at the mouth of the *Great Kanhawa*.

"GEORGE WASHINGTON."

More of

Hugh Pendexter's

Serial of America

The Fighting Years

AS LATE as 1730 the people of Virginia knew but little about the sources of the Potomac, the Roanoke and the Shenandoah, although a few venturesome woodsmen said these streams and a tributary of the Mississippi headed in the same mountains. The affectionate relations between William Penn and his colony ceased only at his death in 1718. Thereafter the proprietary family, residing in England, ruled by deputy. King George's War, 1744, ended Pennsylvania's peaceful era and delayed frontier advancement. Travel to the west by the settlers was blocked by the mountains. For nearly two hundred years after Columbus sailed to America the Ohio valley remained practically unexplored. Both Spanish and French adventurers reached the Mississippi ahead of the English.

France claimed the Ohio country by virture of La Salle's explorations. The Iroquois claimed it by virtue of conquering the Shawnee and other tribes. The English awoke to the fact that here was a rich prize, and in 1744 filed their claim to it on the strength of their treaty with the Six Nations in that year at Lancaster. Five years later Celoron de Bienville was sowing lead plates along the Allegheny and Ohio "as tokens of renewal of possession heretofore taken."

The time came when the Ohio and other land companies laid claim to some three million acres of Ohio lands and several colonies were jealously insisting on sharing the rich domain. Throughout the ensuing bitter dissensions the French steadfastly claimed all. The Indians—Delaware, Shawnee and Iroquois—naturally were puzzled. As far back as tradition went the red men had owned these lands. They were cajoled by the French, who warned them that the English were coming to filch their ancient homes. They received belts and gifts from the English, who earnestly cautioned them against having any business with the land-grabbing French. Now and then a patriot would clear his ears of flattery and promises and shift his gaze from rum and brandy, English or French goods, to survey the mighty mountains, the majestic rivers, the endless forest, and would demand to be told just where were the Indians' lands.

For years this rare mix-up of rival claims continued. Each royal master insisted on ownership. Inside this big quarrel were various smaller quarrels.

Pennsylvania's problem was to keep peace with the Iroquois who had sold Delaware and Susquehanna lands to the Penns, but which the Delaware and Shawnee tribes

"The Fighting Years," copyright, 1926, by Hugh Pendexter.

claimed, and at the same time to prevent the last two nations from joining the French. Virginia's problem was to protect the vast holdings of her land companies, to keep peace with the Iroquois while catering to the Iroquois' ancient enemies, the powerful Cherokee nation and the Catawbas.

In 1750 the Indians on the Ohio were prophesying England and France would be at war in another year. There was great excitement in all the Colonies when the French descended to the forks of the Ohio in 1754 and seized the unfinished fort in charge of Ensign Ward. This was the first overt act of hostility since George's War, and the prelude to the Seven Years' War. This is more commonly called "The French and Indian War," despite England's readiness and eagerness to use all the red warriors she could secure. It could as appropriately be designated as "The English and Indian War."

It was fortunate for all the Colonies that Pennsylvania and Virginia were quarreling over the Ohio country while England and France prepared to war for it. Both Colonies were eager to defeat the French, as each believed victory would give it the prize. King George's War had emphasized once more the lack of concerted Colonial action when only one section of a frontier was endangered. In this same year, 1754, the irascible Dinwiddie, Governor of Virginia, announced his conviction that the forks of the Ohio were not within the province of Pennsylvania, but belonged to Virginia. This was the beginning of an inter-Colonial quarrel that was not to end until a score of years had passed, specifically, until after the brief and successful Dunmore's War, when the brewing Revolution ousted the bitter sectional animus and prevented open strife.

Those whose duty it was to protect the Pennsylvania frontier in an Indian war were hampered by the peace policy of the Quakers. In the fall of 1757 the Quakers sent a message and two belts to the Six Nations, stating that they had no concern in the war and were determined, as the descendants of the first Onas (William Penn), to hold to the treaties of peace entered into by their forefathers.

In part their speech was:

"If you are inclined to carry on war against any nation, we have everything fit to kill men with in plenty, such as guns, swords, hatchets, powder, lead, clothing and provisions, which we are ready to furnish you with. . . . If you are determined to

strike the English you must kill the soldiers only, and not us, for we have no hand in the war, nor will we concern ourselves in it, but supply you with everything in plenty, as we have enough, and if you should determine to strike the French we will likewise furnish you plentifully with everything for that purpose. . . . We expect no more blood will be spilt in this Province, but if the war should continue, and you engage in it, you may kill men enough in other parts of the country without coming here." *

There were three main routes to the forks of the Ohio followed by the agents of land companies, missionaries, traders and the aborigines. There were Indian paths, worn deep centuries before the red man ever knew there was a white race. In 1753 Washington followed the southern trail from the site of Fort Cumberland on the Potomac, through the valleys of the Youghiogheny and the Monongahela to the forks. This was the route Braddock and his ill-fated army took in 1755. The Cumberland National road followed this line early in the nineteenth century.

The central trail was the most direct for Pennsylvanians and passed through Carlisle, Shippensburg, Raystown (Bedford) over Laurel Hill, Loyalhannon (Ligonier) and over Chestnut Ridge to Shannopin's Town at the forks. Christopher Gist, agent of the Ohio Land Company of Virginia, took this path in 1750. Eight years later General Forbes cut a military road out of it and later still the Pennsylvania wagon road to the Ohio followed it.

The northern, or Kittanning, path was the oldest and the one most used by the traders. George Croghan was familiar with it, as was Conrad Weiser before him. Another, and a minor trail, led to the west branch of the Susquehanna and Venango by the way of Sunbury. This was the dangerous route taken by Christian Post, Moravian missionary, whose two trips to hostile tribes contributed more than the efforts of any other one man, perhaps, to holding back the disgruntled Ohio Indians from joining the French.

This last war was waged for the control of river systems and, of course, whoever controlled a river held the adjacent country. It opened badly for the English and, for three years, continued so. Braddock and his imposing army walked into a trap in 1755 in an attempt to secure control of the Ohio. The attempts to make safe the head of the Hudson and to penetrate to the St. Lawrence cost many lives and gained but little.

Oswego fell, and the winter of 1757-8 was one of rejoicing and much gaiety throughout Canada. For two years Canada had more than held her own and the people enjoyed a sense of security. Satisfied she was breaking down the spirit of the Colonies and was almost at the goal, she relaxed her morale. Peculations became common in the commissariats. Fortunes were stolen from the Crown. Subordinates saw their superiors profiting hugely from the war. Montcalm and Vaudreuil were at odds. Nevertheless Canada rejoiced.

What military successes she scored were due to the province's despotically paternal form of government. The country was peopled by soldiers and their descendants. For many years each generation had been trained in forest warfare. This gave military efficiency. These advantages were offset, however, by Church and State possessing and exercising too much authority. The people were thereby prevented from becoming self-governing and self-dependent. The system discouraged home-building.

The English Colonists had been entirely neglected and consequently had learned to do for themselves. They took naturally to the sea as well as to the forest, especially those in New England. They realized the war had been conducted miserably, and the winter of 1757-8 found them in a state of sullen despair. William Pitt, intensely disliked by his king, became Secretary of State in 1756, only to be summarily

* Sir William Johnson's Papers. Vol. 2, p. 776. Pub. 1922 by University of the State of New York, under supervision of James Sullivan, Ph. D., State Historian.

dismissed in the spring of the following year. But George the Second soon found he could not do without him and he was restored to head the Ministry; and in him the colonists found their great hope. He sympathized with them and was eager to help them. His choice of Abercrombie to succeed Loudon was unfortunate and almost disastrous, and yet his good-will outweighed his errors of judgment. He promptly removed the discriminations that had favored royal commissions.

The pivotal year of the war, 1758, opened ominously. There were no new plans to forward the war. Amherst and Wolfe were to attack Louisburg. Abercrombie and Lord Howe were to attack Ticonderoga. Fort Duquesne became an important objective again, as it had been in '55. This was insisted on by Colonel George Washington, who announced he could no longer protect three hundred miles of frontier against Indian raids with one regiment of men and demanded that Duquesne, the enemies' rendezvous, must be destroyed. Over the road Braddock had cut poured in the savages, and never had the frontiers of Virginia and Pennsylvania been harried as they were after that evil day on the Monongahela.

So came the year of 1758, with the stage once more set for the fighting. So came a renewal of the bloody business. And the red men around their fires on the Ohio, or attached to the armies, continued to wonder just what would be left for them when France, or England, had won.

CHAPTER I

AT THE DEATH OF THE FOX

EVER since early April General John Forbes had been in Philadelphia endeavoring to raise an army to lead against Fort Duquesne. Now it was May, and he was still troubled by transportation problems. His quartermaster-general, Sir John Sinclair, was a nuisance and appeared to be capable only of making blunders and antagonizing the country people. Owners of carts and horses were slow to help, inasmuch as many had not been paid for moving Braddock's army in '55. Forbes had been warned he must pay cash on the spot if he would secure wagons and horses, and, although a sick man, he found himself obliged to attend to matters that should have been in the daily routine of a sergeant or regimental quartermaster. Sinclair only added to his perplexities. The general had accompanied Loudon's "cabbage planting expedition" to Halifax in the preceding year, and only his indomitable Scotch will and the efforts of his officers at last began producing results.

The streets were fillled with a motley of people as Elizabeth Joy and I walked from her father's anchor-forge in Front Street, made our way up Second to Spruce and turned west toward the Governor's Woods. For more than six months I had been looking ahead to this spring day while scouting the Virginia frontier under Colonel Washington and during more dangerous trips into the Allegheny country where the French held undisputed sway. I had known Elizabeth for three years and had grown to be very fond of her, although my frequent absences on the Colony's business had prevented our mutual liking from reaching open avowals. Or perhaps my lonely life had made me a timid creature in the presence of women. However, I had no doubt she understood my intentions. Yet the farther we walked the more difficult I found it to take advantage of my opportunity.

"There is the Owen Jones house we just passed. The first carpet I ever saw is in there. That was eight years ago," she remarked.

I had no intention to discuss carpets, a useless, dirt-catching contrivance. I believed myself fortunate in being kept in town, near her, by my work for a while. Too much information was reaching Canada, and I was expected to locate some of the enemy's spies in Philadelphia. Major

Andrew Lewis was hopeful of my finding some. I had been to Venango and beyond, where I had passed as a Frenchman.

I told Elizabeth:

"I shall have a chance to get reacquainted with the town, as I expect to be here for a time."

Whereat she broke into a flurry of questions about my work since our last parting and scarce gave me time to answer, except as I parried her queries by stating that I would get my instructions on the morrow. We reached the noble woods, a stately reminder of the forest once covering the land where Penn's city stands, without my having made any progress. The longer I deferred speech the more difficult I found it.

At last, thoroughly desperate, I began:

"See here, Elizabeth. I have something to say. Something most important to me."

She brushed back her yellow hair and turned her blue eyes away from me and interrupted—

"Justin, we've made a mistake."

My heart gave a mighty jump. Her words seemed incredible.

"You decided that while I was away last fall and the winter?" I awkwardly asked.

She bowed her head slowly and turned back toward the town without entering the narrow road leading into the timber.

The tulip trees tall as full-grown oaks, were in full bloom and beautiful with their flowers. We had passed ripe strawberries on the way to the woods, and red cherries brightened the city market. The perfume of magnolias sweetened the air, especially when evening closed in; and the flowers of wild vines along the edge of the growth contributed their fragrance. The countryside was dressed as if for merry-making, and was inviting youth to forget the gathering clouds. But the world was bleak and I felt as lonely and isolated as if scouting the heads of the Allegheny under the first snows of drear November. In a dull, numb sort of way I knew that all I had builded was torn down.

I could only say:

"Seems my absence has cost me more than the hardships of scouting close to Duquesne and Venango. Is it the war?"

She hesitated; then shook her yellow head; then qualified:

"Perhaps, in a way. Everything seems wrong. We're all living under a black shadow. I'm sorry, Justin."

I endeavored to pluck up courage and make myself believe it was the war; I essayed to scatter the dark spell by assuring her the new expedition would be brief and successful and no repetition of the Braddock affair.

"Before the leaves fall the Ohio fork will be ours. Yes, maybe by the time the corn is in the silk."

"It'll take a long time to cut the new road," she murmured.

"New road? We shall march over Braddock's road, already cut and waiting for us to use it intelligently."

"You have just returned. Tomorrow you'll hear talk of a new road; one more direct and shorter."

Ordinarily this would have been a shock to me, for I knew Colonel Washington believed the rendezvous would be at Fort Cumberland, the starting-point of the '55 expedition. My own disappointment was to the front, however, and I shifted the talk.

"And the road to you is closed to me?" I demanded.

She nodded and gave me a quick side glance and the suggestion of a smile twitched her lips. But that the smile was due to a highly nervous state of mind was proven by the tears blurring her eyes.

"Look here, Elizabeth," I told her. "Something is bothering you. Tell me what's the trouble. Not now; but tomorrow. We'll walk across the meadows of Peg's Run and see the soldiers drilling at Campingtown. You'll feel better in the morning."

Up came her head and her voice was firm as she answered:

"No. Why do you have to always wear a hunting shirt and trail a rifle through the forest? Why not be like some of the young men in town, who dress decently enough and stay at home? Why spend your time prowling about the woods and running from savages? That is no life for a man to lead."

I thought of the many scouts sent out to spy on our ancient enemy and I recalled quite a few who never would come back. In sad truth such a calling contained no future for a man unless he be content with believing he had helped to make the morrow safe for women and children.

I asked her:

"Would you have liked me more did I wear knee-breeches instead of long ones

tucked into moccasins? Knee and shoe buckles instead of powder-horn and knife? A wig and lace hat instead of fur hat?"

She halted abruptly and for the first time stared steadily up into my swarthy face, and her tender mood was gone. She told me:

"Justin Nolton, what you might have been had you remained in town, I can't say. I only know I've made a mistake. Perhaps it's because I am so sick of war and its misery. I don't know. I only know I feel differently toward you."

"Even this reminds you of our misery?" I asked, and I brushed the fringe of my sleeve.

"Aye. I don't know. I hate the sight of the loping walk of an Indian. Of a rifle, of moccasins, of a wolfskin hat."

"Then you must indeed hate the sight of the man who wears them, Mistress Joy," I sadly completed. "You're turning Quaker."

"I wish there were no French, no Indians, no wild lands to fight over!" she cried.

I had no particular quarrel with that. She stood scarce shoulder-high, and whatever she said or did I must always remember her with great tenderness.

"We must take the French and the Indians as we find them," I replied. "You walked out here to tell me that my belts are returned?"

"If you want to say it in that savage way. It's very hard for me. Am I to be blamed if I find I'm changed?"

"God forbid you ever should be blamed for anything, Elizabeth! I've often wondered that you ever cared to walk with me. I know your father thinks I'm leading a useless life."

"What any one thinks has nothing to do with it. Even the 'I' that's talking now had nothing to do with it. I can't help it any more than I can help the color of my eyes."

All my bitterness was swallowed up in sadness.

"Of course you can't help it," I soothed. "And it's not for me to make it harder for you— These locusts are deafening." The last was quite true. The tiny creatures, now swarming from holes in the ground and drying their wings, were pouring forth such a mighty song of exultation that one needed to raise the voice to be heard.

Little more was said as we walked back. I was silent most of the way. In jerky sentences she continued deploring the war. She even lamented the existence of the land companies, although her father was shrewdly interested in the Ohio lands. She gave me the impression of being put to her defense by my silence. When we had entered the town she announced she was returning to her father's forge and desired to walk alone. I would have left her but our way was blocked by a crush of people waiting to see some troops march past on their way to Campingtown. As I halted beside her I bruskly said:

"Everything is all right, Elizabeth. You've a right to feel as you do and do as you do. Except for an English king and royal governors this is a free country and, please God, we'll keep it that free."

She impulsively caught my hand and pressed it for a second. The troops were close now. The street was filled with youngsters, dancing ahead of the soldiers. With a brave ruffling of drums the British regulars in their scarlet coats swept by, marching with that precision so difficult for the border-trained to copy. Then skirled the bagpipes, and over the heads of the crowd I saw a small detachment of Montgomery's Highlanders—the 77th Foot. A score of Delaware Indians, a Shawnee man and several squaws, were keeping along beside the Scotchmen, held by the barbaric music of their pipes.

"What's coming now?" Elizabeth asked as the Highlanders passed our position.

I stretched my neck and recognized the regulation scarlet of the first of Colonel Bouquet's Royal Americans to arrive from South Carolina. I told her, and with quick interest she endeavored to force her way to the edge of the narrow walk, but the crowd was too thick even for me to make room without using violence.

"I want to see!" she cried, her face flushing.

I placed my hands under her elbows and lightly lifted her as the Royals, largely recruited from Pennsylvania Germans, came up with a precision that testified well to the efficiency of Bouquet's drill sergeants. Elizabeth attempted to wave her hand. The result would have been disastrous for her had I not caught her as she fell.

Her face was crimson as I set her down on her feet. The group before us swirled and parted before the impetuous advance of a stalwart fellow in the regimentals of the

Royals. His eyes lighted as he beheld the girl. He took no notice of me.

She slipped a hand through his arm and, avoiding my gaze, hurriedly made us known to each other. He was Ensign Frederick Petny, of South Carolina, and was in command of the detachment. He was very gallant in his trappings. He bowed coldly; and I was conscious of being uncouth in my forest-stained dress. My weather-dyed face and long black hair, innocent of powder, was in decided contrast to his woman's complexion and regular features.

Elizabeth had not been quite frank with me. She did not dislike war-gear when it was a gay uniform, gracefully worn. Without further notice of me he turned aside with her clinging to his arm and loudly commanded the people to make way.

"I am going to the forge," she told him. "No, go home. Streets too crowded. I can't go with you now. Remember our trip to Fort St. David tomorrow. It may be our last holiday together for some time."

I forced a passage to save Elizabeth from further confusion. When she had accepted an invitation to enjoy an outing at the St. David fishing-club at the falls of the Schuylkill my unexpected arrival in town must have embarrassed her greatly.

I wandered some time about the town, a town of bridges, my feet leading me where they would. Then came the yearning for friendship, and I began watching for one who would never "change his mind." This was Giga-tsuhli, or "Bloody-Mouth" in English, born of a Cherokee woman and a Scotch father.

For many months he had been my faithful companion and I loved him as a brother. And I had been quick enough to leave him to go philandering. Now I needed him, needed the companionship and sympathy of his silence.

Scanning the drifting groups I saw many Indians, mostly eastern Delawares. Invariably these were following the bag-pipes. Big Conestoga wagons from Lancaster county, where they bred a strain of powerful draught horses in the Conestoga valley, rumbled by. These were to be organized into wagon-trains by the fussy Sir John Sinclair, just as they had been used on the old Braddock road. Drawn by four or six horses, and with the under body painted blue and the upper woodworks red, these sturdy vehicles were somehow a symbol of the Colonial spirit for me, and prophesied success for the expedition more strongly than did the gathering army.

There were soldiers wandering and loitering and soldiers marching trimly. There were men of my own calling, and the loose hunting-shirts and wolfskin hats established a fraternal feeling at sight. But these were not inclined to be loquacious. If Elizabeth Joy looked down on us of the forest path, so did we in turn feel superior to trained regulars and awkward provincials. I saw many men who should have been left free to maneuver in woods fashion compelled to imitate the over-seas soldier and succeeding poorly.

There was much gossiping among the townspeople, and among the country people drawn in to enjoy the show of an army in the making.

"They say this new man, General Forbes, is sick," I heard one tell another.

"Likely enough. Braddock would 'a'been lucky had he been sick before marching," replied the other.

"Our Colony won't help move no army that marches over a road that helps only Virginia," a shrill-voiced woman called out to a driver of a Conestoga wagon.

"We'll lick the French, Mother, before settling our own troubles," the man good-naturedly bawled back.

Scepticism, too, was frequently expressed as to Forbes' ability to succeed in forest warfare. Braddock had made an imposing impression. If so doughty and arrogant a fighter as he could be easily trapped, what couldn't be done against the silent Scotsman? None of us provincials knew much about Forbes. He was a veteran of Continental wars, we were told, and had taken part in more than thirty pitched battles. That presaged but little for his success in fighting Indians. None believed him to be brilliant, but many of us knew he was stubborn. Until I had arrived in town I had had no intimation our leader was an invalid.

Some of the by-standers were frank in prophesying destruction of the army. Here and there fugitives from the outlying valleys attempted to hold an audience by bloody recitals. The townspeople, however, were used to such stories. The winter before, the people of Philadelphia had seen the remains of three Indian victims paraded through the streets before being placed on view in the State House. They had been

frozen in ice and brought from the ruins of their home, man and wife and grown-up son, to serve as an object lesson and to drive the Quakers into cooperating with the authorities. Many false rumors from the various fronts were bandied about, while the truth was always bad enough. Our general apprehension that we might lose the Ohio country unless we reduced Duquesne before another winter was well warranted. To say the Quakers in their love of peace were not helpful would be to express it very mildly.

It was while idling before the sign of The Death of the Fox in Strawberry Alley that I received a more convincing intimation that Forbes was a sick man. A Highlander told his kilted companion, a pipe-major—

"The Iron Head is bad again."

By this name was the general called among the Scotch soldiers. Yet, ill or well, he had been compelled to do the work of a clerk ever since coming to the city, and surely if a will to do went for anything he was the man to level all obstacles. Truth was, however, the provinces thus far had had but little to impel optimism. We had been living in the shadow ever since the fort commenced at the Ohio fork by Captain William Trent was taken over and completed by the French. Since the Braddock failure fugitives from the entire frontier had been fleeing across the Susquehanna, some coming to Philadelphia and some continuing into the Jerseys.

Yet it was a monstrous shadow to be cast by such an insignificant structure. Along with Bloody-Mouth and some Iroquois sent by William Shirley, then commander-in-chief of his Majesty's force in North America, I had scouted the place, and we of the forest were convinced it could be reduced by five hundred riflemen, especially if aided by a heavy gun or two. There would be no military problem as to capturing the fort, could the necessary forces reach the fork. The difficulty was in getting there.

Montcalm in '56 pronounced it not "worth a straw." This was a year after the best equipped army ever sent to America marched to capture it. In '57 Chevalier Le Mercier reported to Governor Vaudreuil that the fort was too small to withstand a siege. From the top of a bush-covered hill our scout-band had reconnoitered the squat structure at our leisure, and I had scratched a picture of it on my powder-horn.

The defense consisted of square logs, transversely placed like timbers in a mill-dam, with earth filling the interstices. The thickness of these ramparts was the length of a log, or sixteen feet. The parapets on the ramparts offered no serious obstacle; nor did the deep ditch protecting the sides away from the water, provided trenches were opened. Inside the ramparts were clustered some thirty small log houses. Outside were the usual huts and wigwams of Indians who always gathered around a French fort.

Yet this trifling pile of logs poured all the evil that for three years had harried and devastated the borders of Virginia and Pennsylvania.

If the Highlander was correct, and the "Head of Iron" was sick in any seriousness, then the Colonies could bid farewell to all hopes of conquest for this year. I sighed dismally, for the moment forgetting my personal disappointment.

"My brother's spirit is growing black," spoke a well-known voice in English over my shoulder.

I turned and beheld Bloody-Mouth, who had happened upon me while following the pipe-major into the alley. He was freshly painted with a red circle around his mouth, with straight lines of black and white extending from the circle at his ears, eyes and far down on his massive throat. His was a fearful visage for the timid to gaze upon, yet he was my closest friend.

"I have been thinking of Duquesne, Brother of the Wolf People." For he was of the Wolf, the principal clan of the Cherokees.

He stared at a band of Highlanders passing the head of the alley and slowly remarked:

"Many of them will have an ax stuck in their heads. Their souls are turning black."

"They are short, stout men. They will fight hard in the mountains," I reminded.

"They will fight strongly," he admitted, his eyes glistening as the pipes struck up, "Hey, Johnny Cope." Then he added, "An evil shaman has laid down a black path, before them. They are marching toward the Ghost Country in the Twilight Land."

"My brother has had a bad dream."

"He sees what is in his head to see," was the quiet reply. "Many of these little men have heard a Raven Mocker. They will die."

"Why does my brother say we are

whipped before we start to fight?" I sharply demanded.

"Higinalii,"* he softly answered, and he clamped a powerful hand down on my shoulder. "We were together when we looked down on Duquesne. We were together on the Allegheny when Joncaire's wild men gave us a fight."

"We were together, brother of the Wolf—and men must die if wars are fought."

"To die quickly is not bad. To see some of those little men half in the black ground and yet alive, is bad."

His speech, at times, contained much of the sacred formula of his people, and impelled the suspicion that he had been a powerful shaman. That he had had some serious trouble in his nation was suggested by his failure to return home in all the years I had known him.

His talk depressed me and with a bit of irritation I said:

"If my brother can see what is waiting for us far up the path of life let him tell me how long we must keep on being killed before we whip the French."

He was silent for a minute, his dark eyes half closed. Then he abruptly answered:

"This is the last war with the French. They are hurrying into the Twilight Land. I see English axes sticking into their heads. They will not go to water† again to fight my brother's people."

"How can Giga-tsuhli's soul be heavy when he knows that?" for now his fierce visage was mournful in expression despite the paint.

"What do my people win after the English have driven the French down the Black Path? What do the Delawares, the Shawnees, the Catawbas and the Iroquois win?"

I had no answer. I felt sorry for his race because he was my friend. I could trust him as I could trust my right hand. He would spend his life as quickly as a wastrel would throw away a shilling if the sacrifice would save me from evil. We had been companions for much of the time since the Braddock year and were satisfied with each other. But I knew nothing of his history.

"What do my people win?" he repeated.

"We will not be here to know. That is very far away," I evaded. "Very soon—tomorrow, perhaps—we will go into the woods."

He scrutinized me sharply and I felt my face growing warm.

"You ran like Little Deer, chief of all the deer, to find a woman. Now you are glad to go back to the forest."

"I will go to Campingtown in the morning and ask for work where there is room to breathe."

"That will be good. The warrior's tree* is showing its red flowers. It is a good tree. All the time, in every moon, it wears some red. Go to Campingtown alone. Giga-tsuhli will be waiting in the woods where my brother's soul began to turn black because a woman looked at another man."

He might have known I had walked with Elizabeth to the Governor's Woods, but how did he know she had "looked at another man?" His mental processes often were beyond my comprehension. One had to take him as he was, strangely prophetic at times, and always the most complete fighting-man I had ever had for a companion.

He left me as the people began scampering out of the way of the New York stage, three days on the journey and coming by the way of Trenton and Perth Amboy. John Butler, set up as proprietor of the line by the old Hunting Club which for years he had served as huntsman and kennel-keeper, bustled forward as the horses halted before the inn. I entered the inn to be clear of the crowd.

The first passenger to alight was a young man in black. He handed an ancient traveling-bag of heavy woolen homespun stuff to Butler and began asking questions. Retaining the bag, but anxious to check up the passengers, Butler cast a glance at me at the window and said something that sent the young man inside. The young man entered and approached me. Despite his somber attire he had a merry face and most gallant bearing. I found myself liking him even before he spoke.

"The inn-keeper says you are Mr. Nolton and can give me some information," he began. "I am Richard Arlington, of England. I am touring our provinces and taking some notes of the people and their lives. The inn-keeper says you are acquainted with the country to the west."

"I am familiar with some of it."

"Then you can help me if you'll be so good. I desire to travel to the West."

* "You are my friend."
† Cherokee ceremony of preparing for a war-path.

*Red maple.

I shook my head.

"You'd get killed very soon, sir, once you got beyond the frontier settlements. Small bands of savages are continually picking up travelers west of the Susquehanna. It's poor time to see the Western country."

"Oh, I'm not entirely helpless," he confidently assured me. "I was in the Lake Champlain country last year and am acquainted with rough living. I won't be a nuisance."

My instinctive liking promised to become esteem. An "Old England" man was received in Pennsylvania with much social favor; often beyond his deserts. And it was refreshing to find one who preferred risking his neck on the frontier to wasting his time in senseless frivolities.

I told him:

"Your letter will secure you a hearing among the officers of General Forbes' staff. I am only a forest-runner, a scout. If you will go to Campingtown and see one of Colonel Bouquet's officers I'm quite certain it will be arranged so you can satisfy your curiosity without losing your hair. If you like I'll call a boy to lead you there. Your man can carry your bag to the Indian King, an excellent tavern."

The last was prompted by the sudden appearance of another passenger who was carrying the traveling-bag Arlington had left with Butler.

"Let me set you right on two points," affably continued Arlington. "This inn will do nicely, I expect, and this gentleman is William Samp of Massachusetts. He has been a most genial traveling-companion and has given me much information about our Colonists and our plantations."

This did not set so well. "Old England" men were too apt to speak of us in a proprietary sense.

Yet Arlington was using the common terms of the times and of his kind. Also, it was in his favor that he was not too finicky about his lodgings. I had seen "Old England" men turn up their noses at our honest inns and ungraciously accept the hospitality of our most pretentious homes.

"I'm a law-officer, mister," importantly explained Samp.

"By Jove! I was forgetting that. It's quite true. Friend Samp is a rogue-catcher. He was hunting for a rare scoundrel in New York when I happened along and found him beset by a band of young villians too deeply in drink."

"And done me a good turn," added Samp. "I'm down here looking for a villian called 'Dandy' Case. He nigh flooded Boston with worthless Crown Point currency of New Hampshire. I chased him into Connecticut where he's wanted sadly for stealing some horses. Then on to New York where he cut up some rare capers. Not finding him there I'm mortal sure he came to this town."

"The wretch got his name of Dandy from his love of fine clothes and jewelry, I take it, from what friend Samp has told me," Arlington explained.

"He'll stand out among a thousand," declared the officer.

"Many men in Philadelphia wear fine clothes," I remarked.

"Not as fine and with so many gee-gaws as Dandy Case," assured Samp.

"Your best way is to go to the authorities and describe your man as best you can," I advised; and added some necessary directions.

"I'll call at headquarters, too," said Samp. "The rascal may have 'listed so's to throw me of the scent. Oh, he knows I'm hot after him."

His confidence was amusing. We had more than our usual lot of scamps in Philadelphia now that General Forbes was organizing his army. More than one sinner was hiding his identity under a uniform, and an officer was loath to question a man's past if he promised to be good fighting material. I explained as much.

"He's believed to be a spy for the French," added Samp. "He passed French money in New York."

I admitted that fact might make a difference, and advised him—

"Go to Campingtown and state your case."

To Arlington I said:

"If you desire to put up here you'd best arrange for your lodgings now. The food is good, but there are more pretentious inns. And the city is crowded."

"I thank you for your courtesy. I will lose no time in paying my respects to Colonel Bouquet. If you will dine with me tonight and help me with the wine I shall be pleased."

But I was not in the mood, although at another time I should hugely have enjoyed

him as a table-companion. His fine frank face and laughing blue eyes were sufficient credentials among all good fellows, and his being an Old England man was not without its influence. Despite his somber attire and white wig I decided he was a year or two my junior.

I waited until he had secured a decent room, then I went into the crowded streets to be alone and rearrange my life. I must put aside what had been my solace during many days of lonely and dangerous prowling beyond the frontier. It was bitter hard to get used to the fact.

I walked aimlessly, giving no heed to direction, and at sunset found myself near the Governor's Woods. I had not intended to go there again. I halted in the narrow road, now filled with shadows inside the woods, and brooded over the potency of a gay uniform. A figure came through the shadows.

"My brother comes as I knew he would," greeted Bloody-Mouth, the Cherokee.

"You came here to get away from the town."

"It was in my head you would come to me here at this time," he replied. "We will go away tomorrow?"

"Ay. To the forest if Major Lewis will say the word. I can't bide the town. But they may want me to stay and look for French spies in the town and at Campingtown."

In silent companionship we loitered until the sun was hidden and then slowly retraced our steps to the light and the confusion. I remember I had eaten nothing since morning and urged my friend to join me at The Death of the Fox. He said he had eaten but would go with me to the inn.

The place was bustling with men coming and going. Soldiers with or without leave were eating and drinking and making much noise. I found three forest men, drinking heavily, but as taciturn as if scouting Laurel Hill. I joined them and the Cherokee squatted in a corner behind the table.

As I was seating myself the man Samp entered. His face was flushed as if from liquor and his bearing was important almost to the point of being ludicrous. In an arrogant voice he inquired for Mr. Arlington and was told the Englishman had not returned.

Then he saw and recognized me and loudly proclaimed:

"Something more important now than chasing that rascal." And he tapped the breast of his coat. He proceeded to enlighten us, "Officers at Campingtown know a proper man when they see him. I'm starting by first stage for New York with secret papers for Sir William Johnson. When Boston knows how big my errand is folks will say I'm something more'n a thief-catcher. Yes, sir!"

"Hush!" I growled. "You're telling your business to a score of strangers."

"Ain't telling my business to nobody," he stoutly replied. "Nobody can git anything out of me."

And again he patted the coat over the inside pocket.

I advised him to retire and sleep off the liquor and turned back to my amused friends. Our talk was of our work. Red Chester of the flaming head prophesied an early raid as far east even as the southern part of York county, where several Scotch-Irish families had settled on the "red lands" at the head of Marsh creek.

"They're mistook on thinking the South Mountains will keep the Injuns off their backs," he concluded.

Old Jacob Wetzel did not believe any raids would be made so far east. The third man questioned Bloody-Mouth, asking—

"When do your people come into the fight, Cherokee?"

"Before the army moves belts will go the Six Nations, clearing the road to Echota,* replied my friend. "Even now Techtama and the Wolf King, our chiefs, are preparing belts† for our nephews, the Delawares. They will be told to come off the Ohio and bring their friends with them, as the ax of our Elder Brothers, the English, is a good ax and we shall swing it hard. Our nephews will be told to keep out of the way so they will not be killed by mistake."

This was news to me although I knew the Delawares had sent a belt to their Uncles, the Cherokees. Why Bloody-Mouth should freely speak of it in a tavern and fail to mention it to me is merely a quirk of the red mind which I never attempted to understand.

"The belt and talk will go to Tedyuskung?" I prompted.

Bloody-Mouth bowed his head. Old

*Cherokee capital and peace-town, south bank of Little Tennessee, near the mouth of the Tellico River.

†Belt and talk delivered to the Delawares June 29th, 1758.

Wetzel laughed silently and reminded us:

"Johnson has a mighty poor opinion of Tedyuskung. Says his talk about being the mouthpiece of all the Delawares and all the western tribes is a rant beyond anything he ever heard."

"Croghan doesn't like him. Doesn't like any of the Delawares and Shawnees," added Red Chester. "I've seen our folks try to keep Tedyuskung drunk at peace parleys, but they can't fool him. It's a caution how drunk he can be all night and then be clear-headed in the daytime."

"The Iroquois and Delawares say they won't help us if the Cherokees pick up our ax," I remarked. "And the Six Nations haven't much use for the Delawares and Shawnees. It's a mixed-up mess."

"There will be belts enough to smooth all roads," insisted Bloody-Mouth.

"Forbes will have to do as old Braddock did: git along without any Injun help, declared Red Chester.

A wild yell from the back part of the tavern interrupted our talk. The Cherokee came to his feet as if worked by springs, his ax half drawn. The borderers were almost as prompt.

"A drunken wring! Room for us to take a hand!" hopefully exclaimed Red Chester.

"A dead man is calling!" cried Bloody-Mouth.

We ran to the door leading to the cooking-quarters of the inn but fell back when Samp reeled through the doorway, his eyes fixed and staring. For a moment I believed he was hopelessly intoxicated. Then the Cherokee sprang forward and saved him from falling and drew away the hand pressed convulsively against his side. There was blood on the hand, the coat was slashed from the right breast to the skirt.

"Tricked me! He tricked me!" whispered Samp; and his head fell forward as if his neck had been broken.

Bloody-Mouth eased him to the floor and darted to the back of the house. I leaned over the dying man and urged—

"Who did it?"

"The papers! Johnson's secret papers," he whispered. And life went from him as he murmured the last word.

We ran after the Cherokee and found the domestics in a rare confusion. They had seen nothing of the murder and had known nothing of it until they heard Samp cry out. He had entered the kitchen and made a nuisance of himself and had been induced to retire. To reach the front of the inn he had to pass across a short narrow hall entering from the side of the inn. This hallway was scarce five feet wide and was unlighted. There in the dark he had been attacked and stabbed to death and his pocket rifled.

On returning to the dead man we found a crowd of guests and men from the street.

"What's happened?" asked a gentle voice at my elbow.

I turned and faced Arlington, the Old England man.

"Something for your note-book," I replied. "Your traveling companion has been robbed of papers and murdered."

CHAPTER II

TWISTED TRAILS

THE British barracks at Campingtown were built soon after the defeat of Braddock's army where fields of buckwheat had been harvested. A causeway was laid across the marsh meadows of Peg's Run. The parade ground fronted on what was to be a permanent extension of Second Street and was shut in by an ornamental fence. The other three sides of the square consisted of barracks, two stories high, with a portico extending along the entire structure. In the middle of the barracks on the west side was a three-story building occupied by the officers. All this structure was of brick and was large enough to accommodate three thousand men. It was an imposing set of buildings and drew crowds from the outlying towns.

The next morning there was the usual gathering of city and country folks lining the fence and watching the soldiers at drill. I saw many young beaux with their sweethearts and winced, remembering what had happened to my hopes during the last twenty-four hours. I passed through the entrance and walked under the long portico to the officers' building, where the sentinel asked my business and allowed me to enter the big room at the right of the entrance. While waiting for some one to secure me an audience with Major Andrew Lewis of Virginia, I watched the animated scene.

Officers in all their panoplies of war were coming and going. Young aides darted back and forth as if carrying the weight of

the throne on their slim shoulders. Out of the window the veteran drill sergeants were whipping long lines of provincials into shape. Bonneted and kilted Highlanders were going through the drill with excellent precision, and it was these troops and their weird bagpipe music that held the greatest attractions for the sight-seers.

Down the stairs came Major James Grant of Ballendalloch, of Montgomery's Highlanders, an impetuous, ambitious man and a very brave soldier. He was barely quit of the building when Colonel Henry Bouquet and Sir John Sinclair entered from a rear room. As they halted near me Sir John was saying:

"Adieu, my dear Bouquet. My lot is harder than yours. For the greatest curse the Lord can pronounce against the worst of sinners is to give him business to do with provincial commissioners and friendly Indians. No man can move an army on promises, quibbling and dissension. And such an army!"

"They seem proper men, Sir John. The Scotch regiments have much to learn about forest warfare although some of them were well blooded last year in the North. Yet they'll do. My Royal Americans will fight their bigness."

"I had the new levies in mind, Colonel," replied Sir John. "Our general has a poor opinion of them. They're too —— stiff-necked."

"Some poor timber. Of course. It's always so when you build an army. England thought rather lightly of the Highland regiments sent over here.* As to provincial officers, service will quickly weed out the unfit and leave us such men as Colonel Washington. I am off at once to travel the Shippensburg road to Ray's Town. There'll be no trouble in dropping down to Fort Cumberland from Ray's Town?"

"Not a bit. Then we have the Braddock road to bush. We'll soon be at Duquesne."

"We'll be at Duquesne in good season," slowly agreed Bouquet. "But even with a road already laid down it'll be irksome to move an army three hundred miles through that wilderness."

"Everything is moving smoothly, Colonel. My magazines of forage will be completed at Cumberland long before the army comes up. The Maryland men and the Virginians are keen for the fighting. Would I could say as much for the rest of the provincials."

"We'll weed out the unfit. Then all will be keen for it," heartily declared Bouquet. "I only hope the general's health will show steady improvement. He's spent too much strength in matters he should not have bothered with."

"He's had no need to bother about my department!" was the crusty reply.

Colonel Bouquet started to speak, then noticed me in the corner and peremptorily called out—

"Your business here?"

I gave my name and business and explained that I was waiting to see Major Andrew Lewis.

Colonel Bouquet softened his tone and said:

"I remember your name. Major Lewis called my attention to the good work you did on the Allegheny."

With that, he passed out with the peppery Sir John, and my dark face burned with pride at his gracious words. Bouquet was a Swiss and trained in European wars; yet he had shown great readiness to learn a new system of warfare in the New World. Where a Braddock, or some of the overseas officers with Forbes, thought it beneath them to take lessons from a rifleman, Colonel Bouquet was never above absorbing information, let the source be ever so humble.

A few minutes after Colonel Bouquet left, the door opened and Ensign Petny, Elizabeth's gallant, entered. He gave no sign of having met me before, so I knew Bouquet had told him I was waiting. Otherwise there would have been a flicker of recognition. I stated my business.

He went out, and after an absence of a minute or so returned, and coldly said—

"Major Lewis will see you now."

I followed him to a smaller room where Major Lewis was seated at a table, busy with some muster-rolls. With a glance he dismissed Petny and motioned me to be seated. Although cold and austere enough in the routine of duty, he was a neighborly sort of a man with us of the forest. He finished running his gaze over the papers, then placed them aside and said:

"Nolton, I've been skimming over these rolls. For what reason do you think?"

*One English paper said in part: ". . . they are a people totally different in dress, manners, and temper from the other inhabitants of Great Britain. They are caught in the mountains when quite young."

"To see if all the companies are completed."

"To see if I happen on the name of a man whom I could suspect as a possible spy in the service of the enemy."

"I suppose the French have spies among us," I remarked.

"I know it. You've heard about a man named Samp being murdered last night in Strawberry Alley?"

"I was in the inn when he was murdered. The Death of the Fox."

"Did you know he was killed for the sake of some papers he was carrying?"

"He boasted of having them on his person when he entered the inn, sir."

"Poor fool! And he must have boasted in other drinking places. There's no doubt but what he was followed to the Death of the Fox."

"I'm positive he recognized his slayer, sir," I continued. "For twice he cried out, 'He tricked me!' "

"Doubtless he did recognize the murderer. The papers were not worth his life, however. A French spy killed him to get them, and they'll help France none even if posted on the walls of Quebec. The stolen papers consisted of a copy of Sir John Sinclar's estimate of gifts and drinks we should take along for the friendly Indians. I advised the copy be submitted to Sir William Johnson and his suggestions invited."

"Several woods friends, who were with me in the front room, agree with me that the murderer entered by a side door and waited and caught Samp in the narrow hall between the bar and the kitchen."

"Doubtless that's the right of it," he continued. "But what's vastly more important in my mind is the belief the victim was followed to the inn from these barracks. I find myself suspecting a certain man. Perhaps 'suspect' is too strong. I have no definite proof whatever. Yet there's a doubt I must remove. I know French spies have been in this city. I believe some are here now and will march with the army. I had expected to use you here, but this murder changes my plans. I'm sending my 'suspect' on a frontier service. I wish you to go along with him and watch him."

He stepped to the door and loudly called—

"Mr. Petny, send me Sergeant Fincer."

Nothing was said between us as we waited a few moments. The sergeant, a stranger to me, entered. The major bruskly told him—

"Take this muster-roll to the regimental sergeant and say I am to have a fair copy of it."

After Fincer had retired the major softly told me:

"That is the man."

I promptly said:

"If he was at the inn last night he was not in the bar. I did not see him."

"He was in town from early evening until midnight. He left here shortly after Samp departed. He shall swing if guilty. The papers are of no importance. But it's of vital importance to learn who receives them from the thief and murderer. I'm after the French agent who receives reports from spies and deserters."

"There's no evidence whatever against this man? Except he was in town?"

"No. Last night when he was in a drunken sleep his belongings and clothes were thoroughly searched, and nothing was found. Yet he originally came from Path Valley, and in that valley are three brothers who have been decidedly under suspicion for more than a year. Their name is Fairden. One of them, John, was in town this spring. We have been unable to learn what business called him here."

"I know of them," I said. "I've seen John Fairden in Carlisle and at Harris Ferry. He claims to be a peace-at-any-price man, sir. His brothers stay close to the valley, but my friends tell me they talk the same. They publicly insist the Indians have been wronged; that a Fairden can go anywhere in red country and not be harmed. The frontier people do not like them. But it's a fact the three of them have remained in Path Valley, suffering no hurt, while their neighbors have been caught and killed, or narrowly escaped death by flight. John Fairden was at Chambers' Fort this spring. He goes there for supplies."

"There are too many peace-at-any-price men in this Colony," grumbled the major. "You can see it's of the utmost importance to establish the guilt or innocence of those three men. You will start for the Conococheague today. Ensign Petny, two soldiers and the sergeant will compose the party. Petny is young, and none but you know my suspicions. You will not, in all probability, go beyond the Fairden cabin.

I will instruct Petny that you are independent of his authority and are included merely to look after an Old England man whom I'm adding to the party. It's a Mr. Arlington, who called on me last evening and presented a letter from General Webb. He waited on me again this morning. He is making notes on our frontier towns. Chambers' Fort will be as far as he is likely to go. I will instruct Ensign Petny not to permit him to wander into danger. You should soon learn whether Fincer communicates in any way with the Fairdens."

A greenhorn on a scout never appealed to me; but Arlington would be at least companionable and would be in no danger except, perhaps, from some lawless whites.

I told Major Lewis:

"I met Mr. Arlington yesterday. He came on the same stage with Samp. He seems to be a very decent sort of a man."

"Young and rather fanciful, I would say. His errand this morning was to inform me that Samp was hunting for a villain known as Dandy Case. He suggested that Case should be looked up, as Samp was the only man in Philadelphia likely to recognize him. I have small faith in any such notion; yet he meant well. He is eager to find the assassin. I quickly convinced him that a villain as cunning as Case is said to be would fear but little from a man lacking astuteness, such as Samp."

"Put it another way," I ventured to suggest. "Say that Case is an agent for the French. Say he served as such in New England. Samp said he was suspected in Massachusetts and New York of being a French spy as well as a passer of bogus bills of credit."

"This is something new. It merits consideration," Lewis slowly decided, but frowning slightly. "And it leaves the Fincer suspicions up in the air."

"And makes the scout to Path Valley unnecessary," I added.

"No! no! Not at all," he quickly corrected. "There still remains the work of learning whether the stolen papers are delivered to any of the Fairdens. If one of the brothers is absent from home you are to trail him and bring him back."

Duty never takes into consideration a man's state of mind. To roam through the wilderness in company with and, to a certain extent, under the command of, a successful rival was most obnoxious. To be quit of his society the moment the errand was finished was my dear desire.

I suggested:

"Give me permission, sir, to carry Sir John's papers to the French at Duquesne or Venango if we chance to recover them. And to go as a deserter if we fail to find the papers. Ensign Petny can bring back the prisoner, or prisoners, if we take any. I'm mortal keen to trade the papers for what I can learn at the Fork, or on the Allegheny."

For a full minute Major Lewis stared at me thoughtfully. Then he smote his fist on the table and softly exclaimed:

"By ——, sir! It would be a rare chance. But a bloody chance. You may leave your hair in a hoop."

"Every man who scouts beyond the Susquehanna runs that risk. My friend, Bloody-Mouth the Cherokee, would go with me."

Again the major was silent, turning the proposition over in his alert mind. Then slowly said:

"I'd give much to know what Chabert Joncaire is up to. We have pulled the French chain of friendship from the hands of several Ohio tribes. But what force of Far-Indians can that Frenchman throw into Duquesne and against our army? That's of prime importance. Would De Ligner, who is at Duquesne, or one-eyed De Niverville at Venango, know you?"

"No."

Another pause. Then he was saying:

"As a deserter you'd run a tremendous risk. That game has been overplayed by both sides. With or without stolen papers you'd have to establish an identity. Some one man is planning this minute how he can deliver Sir John's papers to some French officer. How could you explain yourself as a volunteer spy?"

This bothered me for a moment.

"I'll go as Dandy Case, fugitive from justice and seeking an asylum." I was inspired to suggest.

A smile lighted the grim face across the table, followed by a dubious frown.

"But if the man Case is their spy he is known to them."

"To a French agent or agents stationed here in the Colonies, but not to the fort commanders. I'm positive of that. Case has been trailed closely for two years in New England and New York, according to Samp. If a spy, he has worked through a

French agent here in the Colonies. Men in the French interests are not spoiling their usefulness by acting as their own messengers. They report what they've learned at some station, such as the Fairdens' cabin may be."

He slapped his hand softly on the table and said:

"Nolton, you've volunteered for this. We may be wrong about Fincer but we're strongly convinced the Fairdens are more than they pretend. One or several spies may be leaving reports at their cabin. You'll go; but if conditions arise that tend to put your life in jeopardy you can draw back. But if by any means you can bring us word what Joncaire is doing or trying to do, you'll be rendering the Colonies and his Majesty a great service. You and the Cherokee will be ready to start at noon. You'll find Petny earnest and willing, but better fitted for active service than for any business requiring subtlety. You'll tell him nothing of our talk and plans."

At least Petny had been subtle enough to steal Elizabeth away from me, and my feelings toward him were not amiable as I left the inner room and passed him outside. I did find a small satisfaction in reading disappointment in his face. There would be no holiday for him and Elizabeth Joy at the fishing-club on the Schuylkill. As I left the parade and was making my way through a throng of sightseers and Indians a red man squatting in the warm sun with his back to the fence and with a blanket over his head came to his feet and fell in behind me.

"My brother smells the deep woods," he murmured.

"Man of the Wayahi,* we follow a new trail," I replied without turning my head.

"Is there blood on the trail, white brother?"

"Who knows? Ask the owls."

"Where does the trail lead?"

"To the Conococheague and Path Valley," I answered. "Then to the Ohio fork, or Allegheny. And it may lead to the Twilight Land."

And I stared toward the west, where the souls of dead Cherokees dwell.

"All must follow the path to the Ever-Darkening Land some day," he softly reminded. "A voice tells me we shall find a good trail, a long trail, a red trail."

*Wolf place. Place of the Wolf Clan.

WE LEFT the city shortly after midday, all mounted except the Cherokee, who could walk a horse off his four feet. We met many country people pouring in and I remembered it was the day of the great Spring Fair. Although the war had robbed it of some of its festive atmosphere I had looked ahead to enjoying it. It seemed incredible that my sorrowful awakening was a bit more than twenty-four hours behind me.

But if I was morose over my lost love, Ensign Petny looked as if he were death-struck. This should not have been, for if he survived until middle November and were back in town he would have Elizabeth's company during the second, or Fall Fair. He had something to look ahead to and I resented his downcast mien. I must find my entertainment in killing or being killed by Indians.

Unless compelled to address me, Petny never appeared to notice my presence. A stranger would have picked him for the disappointed suitor; and yet my heart was gloomy enough. For the most part I rode ahead of the others with Bloody-Mouth trotting at my stirrup.

Beside Petny rode Arlington, no longer wearing a wig, and dressed very sensibly in stout, coarse cloth. He was armed with a double-barreled pistol, two pans, two triggers, the latter concealed in the frame until the weapon was cocked. There was too much to get out of order. He was very proud of it, however, and showed us the name of Arlington and Culloden Moor engraved on the silver name shield. His father carried it at the Culloden Moor fight in '46, he told us.

He was an excellent horseman and divided his time riding ahead with me and then with the ensign. He must have realized Petny and I had no love for each other, but never by word or expression did he betray any such knowledge. He proved to be a most pleasing companion. One expected an Old England man to feel above provincials, but Arlington aired no such notions, although he would speak of "our" Colonies and "our" plantations.

Before we were ten miles out of Philadelphia Bloody-Mouth asked me—

"Does the man from over the big water also own all the land?"

At times Arlington sang, his voice being deep and most pleasing to the ear. But I'd

have preferred him to sing of something besides love; "lonesome" songs our country people called them.

Sergeant Fincer brought up the rear with two soldiers called Joe and Pete. I never learned their last names.

We took our time in making the ninety odd miles to the Susquehanna and the ferry operated by John Harris, the second, said to be the first white child born west of the Conewago Hills. I would have preferred greater haste, for if stolen papers were on the way to the Fairdens' cabin and Fincer were not the carrier, we had need to hurry.

Mr. Harris was away from home when we reached the ferry, but we were hospitably entertained and remained over night. Acting under my instructions, the Cherokee searched the sergeant's clothes that night and found nothing. The ferry was also a depot for furs brought from the West and forwarded to Philadelphia on pack-horses. But now the long sheds joined to the house were empty and proclaimed the blight war fastens on all peaceful industries. Arlington declared himself entranced by the charm of the place, as well he might, as the Kittatinny valley at this point is of alluring beauty. I walked with Bloody-Mouth to the flats below the ferry where were the remains of several Indian camps and traces of permanent towns.

"All are now in the Twilight Land," he muttered; and he spoke no more that night.

In the morning we crossed in a big "flat," five men with long iron-shod setting-poles making quick work of the passage. The seventeen miles to Carlisle were covered in good time, with our Englishman, highly approving of the Blue Mountains, escorting us on the right at a distance of five or ten miles. On the way we met the weekly post, Philadelphia bound, and asked for news. We received the usual budget of rumor and little fact.

While we halted to rest our horses Arlington busily made notes of the old stockade and blockhouse built by James Le Tort some twenty years back. The new stockade, with its western gate in High Street, did not interest him as much. There was a garrison of a dozen men where fifty had been on duty directly after the Braddock disaster. But with Forbes about to march on Duquesne and the Ohio Indians reluctant to pick up the French ax, the settlement needed no large number of men. The Cherokee left us to visit Beaver Pond where I followed him through oak and hickory woods, and found him solemnly contemplating the poles that until recently had supported Shawnee wigwams.

There was no change in Petny's somber mood unless, if anything, his face was drawn and his cheeks were hollowing in. It seemed ridiculous that a successful lover could be so downcast because of temporary absence from his sweetheart. I was the one to be morose and miserable, yet I ate heartily and knew that life still contained much for me.

We took the Walnut Bottom road, leaving from the south end of the settlement. I advised against pushing the horses through in a day but Petny now took the lead. After half a dozen miles through poor and stony country which depressed Arlington, I was afoot beside the Cherokee.

There was no chance to change horses as the habitations were squalid and widely scattered through the stunted growth. The second half-dozen miles was through a more prepossessing country, and I took to the saddle again, while the others found it wise to dismount to rest their nags. As we alternated between walking and riding, it was necessary for the Cherokee to dawdle along if he would not leave us behind. Even Arlington's cheery disposition seemed to be affected by the three miles which skirt the northern flank of South Mountains through a gloomy forest of pines. It was late evening when we entered Shippensburg.

We passed down the one street composing the settlement and found lodgings in a double-log house that served as an inn. The German proprietor had a man care for our horses and agreed to supply us with fresh mounts in the morning. Some twenty or more men and women quickly gathered at the inn and besieged us with questions. Was the army on the move? This was the all-important subject.

Ensign Petny briefly addressed them and assured them General Forbes soon would be in motion, but he could not say whether the army would move over the old Monoccasy road or fall down a new road, yet to be cut, from Ray's Town to Far Cumberland. The people partly dispersed while we were eating.

Under the stimulus of food and drink Arlington regained his high spirits and

entertained us by sprightly recitals of his travels. After supper he announced a desire to walk about before retiring. Petny was for bed, and Bloody-Mouth and I went with Arlington. He made a note of the fact that the town was laid out by Edward Shippen and was one of the oldest west of the Susquehanna.

In front of Fort Morris, built after the Monongahela battle, were a dozen riflemen ready to join the army when it was known for a certainty whether the general rendezvous was to be at Ray's Town or Fort Cumberland. Some one suggested a drinking bout and away they went.

Later in the evening, while strolling back to the inn, we halted to listen to some boisterous singing in a cabin. The chorus finished and there was much laughter.

Arlington murmured:

"The wild rogues! They're happy. I would like to join them."

"We need only to walk in and sit down," I assured him. "We'll be most welcome."

I started for the door but he caught my arm and restrained me, saying—

"Wait till after the song."

A man was singing alone:

"Tout les printemps
Tant de nouvelles;
Tout les amants
Changent de maitresses;
Jamais le bon vin ne endort;
L'amour me reveille." *

A chorus of oaths put an end to the song. Bloody threats were made. In a thin voice the singer cried—

"I was making fun of the Frenchies!"

"—— you! Then make fun in good honest English," roared a voice.

"You've made my rum taste bitter. Git out!" boomed another.

There came the crash of a drinking vessel striking the wall.

"Don't! Don't!" yelled the singer.

The door was torn open and Fincer leaped down the lane of light and ran toward the inn.

Arlington quietly remarked—

"That young man will sing himself into a grave if he gets drunk often enough."

"He's beastly drunk and crazy to try any French songs on these people," I explained. "It's an old song of the *coureus-de-bois*, but a poor one to sing down here in these times. You'll find hardly a man or woman in this settlement who hasn't lost a relative in the Indian wars."

"Ensign Petny should be told of the man's indiscretion. I can't speak of it as I'm with you only on sufferance," Arlington gravely said.

"I'll tell him."

And I did, on finding him awake and standing alone by the fireplace.

"Singing in French, was he?" he queried, his haggard face taking on a surprized expression. "I never knew the —— fool knew enough to sing, let alone in any language except English. After I've talked to him he'll have no heart for another performance."

And straightway he made for the end of the long room where Fincer was stretched out on his blankets. That end of the room was in deep shadows and I could not see if the sergeant were awake or had to be aroused. I did hear the ensign upbraid him very severely. At first Fincer answered back with drunken effrontry, but Petny soon cured him of that. I heard a sound as if he had the man by the hair and was beating his head on the floor.

"There, curse you! Is your head clear enough now to know what I've said?" he demanded.

"Enough. I was drunk. Old song happened to pop into my head. No harm meant," hurriedly exclaimed Fincer. "Never again."

"Well for you if you remember."

Then Petny rejoined me and wearily said:

"I'm glad you told me. He's a complete fool when drunk. Before the war he worked for different traders and met some of the French and picked up some of their foolish songs. But he'll have a longer memory next time. Good evening, Mr. Arlington."

I had not seen, nor heard, Arlington enter. That he had overheard some of the conversation was apparent by his quizzical remark:

"When the wine is in the man, wisdom then is in the can!"

"It would appear so. I'm going to try and sleep. We ride early in the morning." That night I searched the drunkard thoroughly and was convinced he carried no stolen papers.

*Every spring something new; Every lover changes his mistress; Good wine never makes one sleepy; Love awakens me.

To Be Continued

Sydney Herschel Small

Who knows the Orient well

In a new story of Japan

The Temple of the Snake

THERE was no breeze in the valleys; on the summits of the squat Kamasuma hills there was no shade. Laird's path took him through the one and over the other. The way beneath his feet seemed to bubble with heat and the burning glare of the rice-fields surpassed anything he had ever experienced in Japan.

The road itself was little more than an interminable bridge across the terraced paddy-fields. The rice had sprouted, but had not grown rank enough to block the mirror surface of the water from throwing back the heat rays.

When Laird had left the inn at Nagomutsu he had done it cheerfully. The sun had not been out of the hills and there had been a pleasantly cool dew in the grass. Now, however, the entire country was parched, although it was still mid-morning.

He had made, he believed, about ten miles, and the venture had by now throbbed itself into a question of his physical ease. The cords of his legs ached, his eyes ached, his head was distressed—and all, he decided grimly, because of a fool's business.

It was perfectly possible that the report of a white man in Nagomutsu district was no more than peasant's talk. Some cousin of a cousin had heard it said that some one else had said, perhaps, that a white man was *coming* to Nagomutsu—or Noyohatso—or Mutsuyama—and he, with his twenty years in the Orient, had, like an utter ass, believed it.

Yet back of it all, Laird had been fearful that this isolated north Japan district was to be the object of another missionary venture. It had been tried more than once, and always with no measure of success. Laird trusted that it would never be tried again, for a multitude of reasons, not the least of which was the ingrained antipathy of the old-timer in the tropics.

A rival buyer would not have been so bad. Competition was preferable to criticism. Laird, in his late forties, did not believe it would ever be possible for him to change his ways, and it seemed that the various ministers always started with him—He must become, it always seemed, an example to the natives.

Example he would not be—not for any one, or any cause. Laird's blue eyes, faded from a bright color to a veined blue-gray, twinkled as he thought how his explanation that this particular district could not even support a mendicant priest with

copper bowl, had kept that missionary away last winter—example! The sudden thought came to him that it was two winters ago, or three.

"I've been here a long time," Laird said aloud.

He had. North Japan was home to him, and for it and the natives from whom he bought he had a fierce affection.

He walked ahead slowly. There probably wasn't another white man within fifty or a hundred miles. There was no other northward road. The report given him was that the white man had been at the Nagomutsu inn, although the houseboy had admitted that the inn's name was mere supposition. The host of the inn had never heard of any white man. The houseboy's relayed information was, Laird believed now, entirely false. The boy needed a beating. He had needed one for nine years, but Laird had never been able to get around to it. Some day, he decided, he would give the boy a proper one—when it was not so hot, however.

Laird kept his eyes to the path, avoiding the glare from off the water on either hand. He walked more slowly, stopped and looked wearily back along the path. The visualization of the distance of the return journey came to him dully. He shut his eyes, opened his mouth for air and gulped heat.

"I have eaten of the furnace of Hades," he muttered. "Whoever said that in the Kojiki* must have walked this path. If Takagawa hasn't that beer in the spring I'll—yes, I'll beat him this time."

Laird stood still, his body weaving back and forth, as if the vibration of the heat had set it swinging. He could not hope to return to the inn before afternoon at best; home was another eight miles away. The inn would be hot, and he would make them find the old *kuruma* and enlist a tough young rice-coolie to draw it, and him, to his own house in his own village.

Ten miles. Laird wondered whether he were good for ten miles more.

He started to squat down on the path and then shook his head; the heat would continue to sap what strength he had left.

"Let a million missionaries come if they want," he thought. "*I* won't try and stop them again."

The white man looked about, and saw to the left of the path a little clump of

*Kojiki: "Records of Ancient Matters," written A.D. 712.

water-willows growing out of the rice-field. It was several hundred yards from the path. Through the green he caught a glimpse of something darker which was not shadow.

"That's the old Shinto temple," he said aloud. "Abandoned before I ever came here. Funny! Been going to look at it for years—next time I come along I'll investigate."

For a full minute Laird walked toward Nagomutsu again, his steps growing shorter. He looked back over his shoulder toward the clump of trees, and then thought honestly:

"I don't give a —— about the temple. I've seen ten million. But it'll be cool—shady—there. And I'm tired. I need a rest and some water. I'm not as young as I once was."

HE STEPPED into the warm ooze of the rice-field doubtfully, and then smiled, finding the tepid water pleasant to his feet. Each lift of a leg was followed instantly by a sucking sound. In the first fifty feet he lost one oxford and kicked off the mate before he remembered the rocky stretch of trail over the hills.

The second low shoe landed in a cluster of protruding stalks and was plainly visible. With a gesture of anger at it, Laird went about the business of finding the first, now stuck elbow-deep in mud. He pawed about carefully at first and then with increasing vexation. It was some time before he pulled up anything save rocks; time enough for him to plaster his whites with ooze, until he looked like *Kuhebiko* the scarecrow.

The salvaged shoe in hand, he ploughed toward the other and rescued it also; with both secure he headed toward the ancient temple. He did not look down at his clothes, knowing well enough what the mud had done to them. He thought:

"I'll be armored in solid mud inside of a half-hour."

Whether he should strip and scrape the muck off he did not consider. He wanted, first of all, escape from the sun, and rest.

Gradually the mud became more solid, the water less deep and the rice-stalks sparse. In moments more he was out of the field and on a flat not over a half-foot above the water. He came to the first of the trees and behind them found a rough fence. The gate was nailed to the ribs of the fence, but low enough so that Laird was able to step over.

His feet automatically fell on the ghost of a path which led toward the shrine. Thorny brambles and nettley weeds had fought for ownership until they had almost conquered the ancient flagstones; both tore at his unprotected feet and legs. It came to him that it must have been many years since any one had used the path, and this struck him with double force as he stepped into the bare temple-yard. He had seen, as he had said to himself, many shrines and many temples, but never a deserted one, never one without a nodding priest sitting in the doorway.

Laird had no desire to enter the temple. Under the trees it was pleasantly cool, and he wandered about the building until he came to a grassy spot on the shaded side, and stretched out at full length. It was very quiet. Laird closed his eyes, and pushed his toes into the lush grass. He may have slept for five minutes.

His eyes came open. Even in sleep, he had felt a soft dragging across his ankles and, as he raised his head from its green pillow, he saw a very thin, long green-and-brown snake raising its head also from between his feet to stare into his face. After a solemn, beady inspection it wriggled away with slow undulations into the grass. And then, from the spot where the snake had taken passage over Laird's ankles, came the head of another. Laird jerked his feet up under him.

He thought:

"No wonder the peasants keep away from here! This must be one of the shrines of Uhatsu-wata,* and his priests have been turned into snakes. Never saw those brown-and-green fellows before. Guess they're harmless—and guess I'll get out, too."

When he had dropped off to sleep the silence had been oppressive. Now there was a vast hurrying of little noises. Lizards ran along the projections of the rafters under the temple-roof and dropped down the wall to flatten out in the corners. Huge buzzing flies rose from the surface of the hidden temple pool. Mosquitoes came from every shadow. Biting red ants had finished their examination of the strange

*Uhatsu-wata: "Upper Sea-God, and protector of snakes and land dragons.

white legs and, with curious minute sounds, fell to work on them.

Laird stood up, both eyes on the grass.

He made no sound as, shoes in hand, he started to circle the temple. Before he had gone a dozen feet he stopped, bent over, drew on the soggy, mud-stained shoes and continued on his way. He passed the door into the temple—a door sealed and resealed with thousands of spiders' webs. Several times he passed places where the *shoji** were cracked wide, passed with no interest. Temples were bad enough; deserted temples were even worse.

Sunlight filtered through the trees in shimmering bars. Laird paused and reached into his coat for a cigaret. The touch of his mud-caked hand on fabric stopped him and he stooped to wipe his hands as best he could in the grass.

In stooping position he remained.

"Funny!" he muttered, his eyes wide. "Don't remember smokin' when I came here. Must be gettin' crazy from the heat."

He reached a second time for a cigaret, and a second time stopped.

"Couldn't have smoked comin' in," he decided. "Hands covered with muck. Let's look at that cigaret."

It was the same brand as his own. A tentative finger told him that the charred end was still warm.

"Couldn't—but did anyhow," he thought. "Crazy with the heat. First time it's ever bothered me—"

A great green fly bumped against his face, and startled him.

"Crazy with the heat," Laird thought a second time.

His eyes made a hasty survey of the trees, the temple and gradually came to the webbed door, and from it to the near, wide crack in the *shoji*.

He justified his next action: he would stay a bit longer at the temple—inside, where there would be no grass-snakes—stay until the sun's heat was tempered. He had not, he remembered, slaked his thirst. Inside there might be water. He knew well enough that there was never water anywhere save at the pool, but, shaking his head, made the fact vanish.

Laird walked slowly up the three steps—slowly, and with caution. He walked close to the *shoji*, crouching down when he came to a small crack, proceeding around the narrow exterior balcony until he came to the wide slit. Here he stopped.

Spiders' webs hung in gray hammocks—higher than a man's head. But, level with his eyes, he saw none. None save in gray, broken streamers.

He listened, hearing no sound.

"Crazy with the heat," he thought a third time and, with the silent movement of his lips, slipped swiftly inside.

The Temple of the Snake seemed undisturbed, even in the half-light. The rotted fabrics hung down from the altars of the shrines; near at hand were the ashes of incense in the bronze bowls, hidden partly by the blacker dust which the wind had carried from the rice-fields in some season of drought. Laird believed that no fingers of man had rummaged there since the priests had departed, but it was plain that the fingers of decay had been busily working.

"Smoked that cigaret myself—forgot I did it. Those spider webs—blown apart by some storm. Must have been. I'm a fool—heat's gotten to me. Never heard of it hittin' one of us old ones before, but—"

He grinned shamefacedly and, as if to prove his foolishness—his partial expectation of finding some curious intruder—knocked shoe-heel against shoe-heel to loosen the caked mud. The impact and resultant vibration broke loose a roach-infested board high against the inner wall of the temple. It fell to the floor, and angular sunlight from a crevice in the roof touched the carved body of a serpent, giving it tremulous, impossible life.

Startled, Laird stepped back against the panels.

With intuitive rapidity, he squatted down against the wall, hidden from the room by an enormous incense-bowl. He remained motionless behind his screen. The rigidity of his tired muscles brought sweat tickling forehead and cheeks, and he brushed the annoying moisture away by leaning his head against the cool bronze.

Eyes closed, alert for any sound, Laird heard nothing. Then he was curiously aware that, at regular intervals, the incense-bowl seemed to vibrate against his face—short silent shakes, as if the old wooden pedestal upon which it rested were being moved. Instant understanding flooded over him and, motionless as ever, he opened his eyes wide. Somewhere in the room some one was walking—silently, with infinite care.

*Sliding panels.

The moving feet made no sound on the ancient soft matting, but the telltale bowl conveyed the fact to Laird positively.

From his position Laird could see around the side of the bowl and into the room. The bit of carving seemed to crawl with swift blue ripplings along the brown matting. Laird's eyes, accustomed to the faint light, could make out altar, hangings, bowls, shrines, but no moving figure. With a blink of disgust, he gave over staring out into the room and began to examine the walls, following them with his eyes deliberately.

Half-way along the far side he stopped in his examination and dropped both hands to the floor, that he might rise from his squatting position swiftly if necessary.

The bronze bowl had relayed the story. Laird saw, against the wall and advancing circuitously, clockwise, the figure of a man—a man dressed in dark clothing. It was, Laird first decided, a Japanese; he based this decision on the loose coat. The second staring glance showed him that if the man was Japanese, he was the largest Japanese Laird had ever seen.

LIGHT shone on the stranger's face. Laird knew him then for what he was—a white man.

A white man—probably the very fellow he was searching for, and probably also exhausted even as Laird had been—worn by the sun and the long miles; a white man probably resting in the deserted temple and startled, even as Laird had been. Two men frightened out of their senses by nothing more than a roach-bored bit of wood! Laird chuckled noiselessly! And—best of all—no missionary. The cigaret proved that much.

Laird stood up swiftly.

"Hello, old man," he said. "I'm Laird, from up in the hill country. Heard you—or some one—was coming. Just came here to—"

"Stand still!"

Laird had not advanced.

"That —— board scare you as much as it did me, eh? That and the heat had me guessin' for a while. If—"

"Stand still!"

Laird said gently:

"I'm not movin', old man. Let's go outside on the balcony. Gives me the shivers in here. Suppose—"

"Be still!"

The big man had not moved from the wall. His orders were so harsh and so curt that Laird was vaguely alarmed. He said the first thing that came into his head:

"The Japanese desert a temple when it isn't profitable. They never leave behind anything worth a yen. Somebody give you a tale that there are rubies hidden here? I've lived in the Orient for—million years, it seems, and I've never known of any one gettin' anything out of a temple. All stories. Search all you want—*I* don't care. I'm no treasure seeker."

Not until Laird had finished did the other speak. He said then, in the same crackling voice—

"I have told you to stand still, and—not—to—speak."

Laird humored him.

"What'll I do?"

"I'll tell you."

The villagers of Laird's district spoke to him gently. Even the company officers treated him, the oldest of them all in years of service, with deference. Here, Laird considered, he was being ordered about, and in no pleasant manner, by a man he'd never seen. Why? Was it possible that the man was a missionary, had smoked, or had even retired to the temple's shade for a secret drinking-bout? Never. If that had been the case the fellow would have been conciliatory and would have welcomed Laird grandly, only to ease him swiftly away from the incriminating scene.

Laird was utterly at loss to understand anything at all. He said crossly:

"Have it your own way. And—go soak your head in the mud!"

He started angrily for the gap in the panels.

Sound—roaring, braying sound which shook dust from the tattered hangings of the room—filled the ancient temple.

Laird knew that the stranger had fired at him, fired and missed. His action was immediate, instinctive. He swung behind the thick bronze bowl and dropped as best he could into its protection.

A second shot and, instant with the sound, the shrill scream of a glancing bullet. The bowl trembled, but remained upright.

"*Shikkar' shiro,*"* Laird cried. "What's th' matter with you?"

For all the anger in his voice, Laird was

*"Steady!"

frightened. There was obviously something up of which he knew nothing. A hundred different thoughts swarmed one atop the other through his head: Was the man a treasure hunter? A temple raider? A buyer of forbidden narcotics? A fugitive from Yoko or Osaka? A combination of all four? It came to Laird that he had been very foolish to leave the comfort of his own house.

The stranger had not answered, nor had he moved.

"Put up that gun," Laird ordered. "What do you think this is? A shootin' gall'ry on Calle San Miguel?"

The stranger began to speak at once:

"The prince of the—Empire of Persia stood against me—one and thirty days—but lo! Michael, one of the chief kings—came to help me—and now I—Michael—have come to make thee understand what shall befall thee!"

The voice rose to a high note and then droned away.

Up in the rafters the troubled lizards made little clicking sounds.

"What you talkin' about?" Laird asked.

He was afraid that he knew. Miguel—Michael. The staid old words could have come from but one book. The worst of all things had happened again—the missionary. And, more to the point, one partially out of his head. Queer. With suddenness, Laird wondered whether the heat had affected this stranger.

"You can not stand against me," the man added.

"Wouldn't think of it," Laird agreed uneasily.

"And now I shall make thee understand what is to befall thee!"

"Yeah—you said that before. How 'bout puttin' the gun away before you tell me all about it?"

As he spoke, Laird reached for a cigaret.

Before the paper tube was at his lips the stranger cried—

"Remove that abomination!"

Laird dropped the paper tube to the floor.

He was apparently as uneasy, as outwardly calm and placid, as at any previous time; at sea he had been, and at sea he was now. His eyes, however, had narrowed. He was doubly alert, since he felt that the stranger—hypocritical—was doubly dangerous.

Since the man in black had said nothing more, Laird began:

"I've thrown the cigaret away, old man. Now you put up the gun and we'll talk this over."

Instead of replying, the stranger began a cautious circling of the wall, and Laird moved with him, keeping the great bowl between them. It was none too easy; the stranger was in shadow much of the time and moved at varying speed. Laird's eyes ached from watching.

He said suddenly:

"What's the game? Who are you, anyhow? And who do you think I am? Don't act like an idiot, man!"

He raised his head as he spoke, and the old temple shook with the immediate explosion of the other's gun.

The bullet was high and went through the paper panel with no sound at all, but coincidentally with the thin rush of air over Laird's head, the bronze bowl clanged and rocked back against him. He had both hands to it instantly and, holding it upright, ducked. Then he placed both hands to the floor, crouching and ready to rise.

The tone of the bowl's singing vibration changed. The first blow gave forth a deep clear boom, like the pealing of autumn thunder—*honnng!* The carved serpents and dragons of the temple writhed. After the first huge shock a multiple echo awoke, a sort of golden moan and with it a new clanging, minor, muffled, was interwoven into the fabric of silky sound.

Laird knew that the bowl had been cracked or fissured and that another shot would split the massive bronze ornament asunder. He counted silently: one, two, three, four. The stranger had one or two shots left—or, at most, three. A venture to draw fire might result in the shot's striking the bowl fairly and in the same spot—and then Laird would be left uncovered, unprotected. He had seen old bronze split apart before, like a halved apricot.

The stranger had moved slightly; he was at last where Laird could see his face clearly.

Thin, ascetic, with grayish and narrow eyes, the man, in his black clothing, might well have been a missionary. Laird was watching him as well as he dared from around the side of the bowl.

It flashed upon him that the man was not watching him and, indeed, was not watching the bowl, but—since eyes did not

meet eyes—must be examining the floor just before the great piece of bronze.

The stranger said in a curious, detached voice:

"Look toward the hole in the wall. Keep looking at it. Get up. Walk out."

Laird remained where he was.

He had been fired upon before, and yet it was not the fear of being shot at again that kept Laird motionless. Anger, heat, weariness—and anger again—had combined in him. He knew, in some strange way, that the stranger would not fire at him now, if he left.

"Are you going?"

"Not until you do some explainin'."

The stranger's voice was almost charming.

"My dear—dear sir, I—was worried—affected, doubtless, by the heat. I'm—an Anglican, sir. I came here—tired—rested—board must have dropped—frightened me—heat—"

It seemed to Laird that he himself had said much the same before.

"Are young cannons part of your equipment?" he asked.

"In a wild country, sir—"

" 'Civilize 'em with a Krag,' " Laird hummed.

"One does not need a rifle," the stranger said gravely. "However, a weapon for defense—"

"First time you've ever been in the Orient, eh?" Laird asked.

Very honestly— "Yes. Oh, yes indeed. And naturally—"

"I see," Laird agreed.

He saw—and did not see. He had difficulty in refraining from humming the telltale tune of the Aguinaldo campaign again—the tune the other had recognized. He almost said, "Don't you call the Islands part of the Orient?" but stopped in time. The slowness of his mind, in merely thinking of the question, showed him clearly how the day's heat had simmered away his intelligence. It must be the same with the other.

"What village are you going to take up residence at?" Laird asked. "Perhaps I can help you."

"Ah—yes. The nearest village, sir. Perhaps you, since you offered, would go ahead and arrange for accommodation for me? My luggage—coming later, of course."

"Funny how the heat affects a man," Laird said gently.

"Yes—yes indeed!"

The man's eyes had never left the floor in front of the great bowl.

"What did you say your name was?"

"My name? Yes—my name! Morrison, sir. Morrison. Hemingway Morrison."

A pause, and then—

"And your own?"

"Me? Oh, I'm Laird. A. I. man. Asiatic Import, you know."

Laird started to stand up, and the man who called himself Morrison said swiftly:

"I prefer to have you remain stooping. Leave the room in that manner, if you please."

Laird saw that the gun was close to Morrison's side, and that it was pointed toward the bowl. He felt, however, that the man did not actually intend to shoot—providing Laird obeyed the order.

"I've never crept out of a room in my life," Laird said. "I'm not going to start now!"

For an instant the room swayed, and then he went on choppily:

"You're a strange minister. I think—I think we're both crazy. Crazy with the heat."

For an instant he did think so. Then, unreasoning, forgetful, he sprang to his feet. He felt the sear of heat on his shoulder and rushed through the gap in the panel. No shot followed him, but above the sound of his shoes on the wooden balcony he heard a tiny click.

Laird whirled in his rush and was back in the temple as rapidly as he had left it.

"I'm sick of these monkey tricks," he cried. "You've made a fool out of me! I know who you are! *Machi m'shite orimashita!* I was waiting for you. I knew that you were coming!"

"*Mah!*" Morrison ejaculated. "I was afraid—"

"Did you learn that word in Oxford?" Laird cried. In the same breath, "Drop the gun. I know it's empty. Suppose you explain this business to me? If you're a missionary, I'm Emperor of Japan. What—"

He had no time to say more.

Morrison had leaped, with a swiftness Laird had not believed possible for so large a man. Laird eluded the attack, but only because it was necessary for Morrison to take several paces to reach him. Laird danced toward the door.

The alacrity with which Morrison advanced convinced Laird that the fellow's first desire was to get him away. Laird had felt this earlier, and felt it with renewed force now. He had no opportunity to slip around the room, but was willy-nilly forced to step out on the balcony and mount the rail lest Morrison hem him between it and the temple wall.

He saw that Morrison had stopped, and stopped also.

"Well?" he asked.

It was a full five seconds before Laird realized that Morrison had the clip out of his gun and was fumbling a shell against the magazine follower. He knew that the wisest time to run was now and that the wisest time to attack would be just as Morrison was sliding the clip into the gun again.

He did not run, nor did he wait; he rushed, hands swinging. Not until he lashed out at Morrison's face did he remember that his right arm refused to move naturally. He did no more than hit weakly at the other's ear.

Morrison's still empty gun came up. Laird moved aside and struck with his left, rocking the larger man with the blow.

The swing of the empty gun missed the smaller Laird with such force that the wielder swung sidewise. Laird clipped him with his left behind the ear.

He followed up his advantage instantly and drove his good arm viciously just above Morrison's heart.

The big man's mouth jerked open; he let both arms fall an instant and Laird, untouched, sank his fist deep into the other's belly. Morrison bent, crumpled, fell.

Laird watched him silently.

"Got the punch left," he thought happily. "He doesn't even writhe. Must have got him good."

He bent over the fallen man and, with sudden decision, unbuttoned his long black coat, reaching inside with an inquisitive hand. His first thought was to feel the man's heart. Strange things happened during the hot season—fellow might have gone out for good—

No, he was certainly alive, and his heart worked well enough. With a new idea, Laird began to search for a pocket. Who was this fellow anyhow? Good thing to find out, before he tied him up and had a dozen or so Japanese lug him into the nearest village.

AS LAIRD'S fingers touched paper, Morrison suddenly became alive—too alive to have been completely out. His arms were about Laird, and he had the smaller man hugged to him. Laird heard him mutter—

"Got you now, shrimp!"

Then neither had time for talking.

If Morrison clung to Laird, the smaller man clung equally desperately. For all he knew Morrison might have slipped the clip into place while Laird had been examining him.

On the ground Laird was at some disadvantage, but he dared not attempt to rise. The time would be sufficient for Morrison to shoot him if Morrison had retained both gun and clip when he had dropped. Laird didn't know—and had no opportunity to find out.

For the space of a full minute they lay embraced, and then Laird felt that he was being slowly, relentlessly, pushed to his side—and, once on his side, the other would be on top of him. What would happen then Laird did not need to be told.

He worked furiously to retain his upper position; felt himself being worked to a slant—and then, with all the strength he could summon, rolled furiously in the direction Morrison was working him, to his side, under and, with the force of the motion, to the top again.

Morrison made a noise in his throat, as if he would say—

"Try that again!"

Laird's nostrils were filled with the body-odor of Morrison. Worse, his right arm—shoulder—side—all were throbbing painfully. He was holding to the other, pinning his arms with his one good arm and his close-pressed body.

Morrison must have seen him wince, in the moment after the frantic shifting of bodies; must have realized that some bullet had grazed Laird, for he gave over in his effort to free his hands and arms and for an instant lay still.

Then Laird could hear him chuckle, and say aloud—

"He wants to roll!"

Again Laird was forced half to his side, and again he accomplished a twist that would have set him atop. He was unable to stop when he was above Morrison this time; the other had rolled him completely over and over.

Each increasingly swift turn brought new anguish to Laird. The very motion dizzied him, but he retained his hold with desperation. He realized now how completely he had been fooled: Morrison had never been badly hurt, and never unconscious; the other had probably believed that Laird, the winner, would leave, or—do what he had actually done. Either would doubtless have satisfied the man in clerical clothing.

They rolled again and again. Once they smashed against the trunk of a water-willow and Laird was barely able to retain his hold. In a moment Morrison would be free. The pain from his arm was choking him.

How many times they went over and over Laird did not know. He could do but one thing—hang on. And hang on he did.

It came to him, through a haze, that when he was swung to his side the sun flashed into his eyes. They must be out of the willows and nearing the rice-fields. A crash verified this supposition, as the old wood of the temple-fence gave to the force of the rolling locked bodies.

Stunned—for he had been smashed against the rotted timbers ahead of Morrison, who was now the entire propelling force—Laird hung on instinctively. Morrison was pressing him hard to the ground each time he was underneath, and Laird realized that the other was playing with him—and had been, save for the first lapse, the first surprize in the temple room.

The grass had given way to the mud which edged the water-covered field. Here the grass was hard, stingy, like minute whips of linen cord. At each turn Morrison crushed the slighter man beneath him, and the game was sufficiently advanced for the black-clad man to begin to play his part:

"Foxy—that first time you rolled, fellow," he told Laird. "But not foxy enough. You wanted to be rolled. Have you had enough?"

Laird had enough—more than he wanted. His head was no longer his own and, in the glare of the sun at last, his eyes saw sparklets of diamond-blue and yellow.

He said thickly—

"Go soak your head."

"No. I'm going to soak yours," Morrison said gaily.

Over and over they rolled. Once Laird felt the slippery body of a tiny snake—probably one of the brownish beaded snakes with which the temple abounded—against his face, and then it was rolled under Morrison as Laird was for an instant on top. Great flies banged at the pair and the beat of their thick viscous wings became an accompaniment to the ringing in Laird's head. Into this was woven also the clang—*honnngl*—of the broken bronze bowl—

The splash of his body into the warm muddy ooze of water awoke Laird to the full possibilities of Morrison's repetition of his own angry suggestion.

Three times he was rolled over in the slop of the rice-field, the third time, underneath. He felt the rush of tepid, stinking water between his head and Morrison's great chest against which it was pressed. Laird struggled frantically to twist or squirm away and was then aware that his own arms were pinioned by Morrison's.

He fought to keep from gasping in water. Slowly he felt his last shred of reason slip away. It was strange: he knew—or should have known—that he was under water and crushed beneath the body of the other man; he could still see, with increasing brilliancy, the shimmering blue and yellow of the sky.

How long he was under he never knew. His breath came with a great gasp as he half realized that he could breathe again.

Morrison was holding him so that only his head was out of the muck of the rice-paddy.

The instant Morrison saw that Laird was conscious, he shouted: "Go soak your head!" and shoved him under again.

The instant in the air had cleared Laird's head. He understood one thing entirely now—the man who called himself Morrison intended to kill him. Laird waited until he could feel Morrison's body against him and then fought to get at his throat with his teeth. He actually had his mouth open; the exertion, coupled with the slow strangling of the muddy water, made him gulp deep. A second time his head swam.

Morrison was forced to shake the smaller man back to life. Laird's first thought was horrible, made so largely by the sight of the sinister-sanctimonious face so close to his own.

He was allowed several gulps of air; then Morrison said queerly:

"Earth to earth's bad enough, fellow. But slime to slime's worse. *That* isn't in any supposedly sacred book, but it ought

to be. I know—I ought to. I was a minister once."

Laird wanted to taunt him; to tell him that he had been kicked out of whatever church had once ordained him. He opened his mouth—and was in the water again.

A craving to close his eyes and cease struggling came over him. What was this all about, anyhow? The very snake which had crawled over him and been crushed beneath Morrison knew as much about it as he himself. Just go to sleep. He felt cool now, although it was terribly hot above the rice-fields— He had done his best— Go to sleep.

He fancied that he saw a dim glow somewhere and guessed that it must be some such dream as comes to a dying man. If only he knew *why!* Morrison was not a missionary—he had known that for some time. What was it that made Morrison want to kill him? Well—what difference did it all make? Sleepy—diamond-blue and saffron-yellow—sleepy—

There was one thing he wanted to tell Morrison before he was dead. One thing—and what was that thing? He could not remember, but the urge was so great that he feebly squirmed—and found that he was free of the body above him!

Wearily his head came out of the ooze and water.

It was a full minute before he was aware that he was not dead: it was another before he was able to realize that Morrison was lying face downward in the water. Morrison did not move, save to stiffen and grow rigid.

Laird stumbled to his knees, pushed feebly at the other and, unable to turn him over, began to shove him toward the dry mud bordering the field. Twice Laird gave over; the third time, knowing how slow and painful his progress was, he lifted Morrison's head, holding it above the water with his left arm and, shoving with his own body, worked the other to the dry rim of the paddy.

Life surged through Laird. He was not dead—he was not dying. His head spun, his legs wobbled, but he was alive! Renewed energy gave him strength and he was able to roll Morrison's body over so that the fellow lay face upward. Morrison's eyes were open, gazing with blank horror at Laird.

Before Laird could jerk out a single word, Morrison writhed in a terrible spasm of agony, lashing out with arms and legs and throwing Laird from his feet. Laird twisted about, but Morrison was not after him now.

Morrison was cursing in English, in Japanese; he raved and shrieked; his face—a moment ago chalk-white—was as red as if lead, boiling, flowed through his veins. Over the ground he twisted, roaring, screaming, shouting blasphemy which curiously changed to bits of real prayer vastly more horrible.

Laird tried once to hold him down, to quiet him. Morrison spat at him:

"Wait—until I get word—consul—can't keep me forever—Japanese jail— What's the life of a Jap more or less—"

And then, with wrinkling lips—

"If you knew what the old Jap I killed told me—"

And then into blasphemy again.

Morrison was completely out of his head. Yet Laird knew that an entire history could be pieced out of the jerky words.

Murder, first of all. Of an old Japanese. Jail—jail for life. If Morrison had not been a foreigner he would have been sentenced to death. Escape—escape in the garb of a missionary. How well Morrison, ex-minister, probable apostate, could play the part!

"If you knew what the old Jap I killed told me—"

Told him? Told him what?

Laird had no time to wonder. Morrison was moaning now and had ceased thrashing about—

"My leg—my knee—my knee—"

The trousers were yanked above the knee by Laird. Just above there were, on one leg, three tiny definite punctures, and a fourth, less discernible, close by. The flesh about the marks was almost black, and puffed white in spots as large as a dollar.

Involuntarily Laird looked about him, but saw no snaky head rise. He said aloud, his brows drawn in a frown:

"They never bother you if you don't anger them. When we rolled over—"

He stopped abruptly.

Morrison had ceased moaning. A smile of mockery curved his lips. Then his jaws worked spasmodically, a thin stream of saliva trickled down his chin, his mouth fell open—

Laird said foolishly—

"He's dead."

The sightless eyes prodded Laird into action. He had a sudden distaste of explaining anything about it all—to any one. Morrison's body must be buried; he need say nothing to any one. The ooze was soft and, on hands and knees, Laird began scooping out a shallow grave on the rim of the paddy. He worked feverishly with his good arm, but never would have been able to make a large enough hole.

At last, exhausted, sick, spent utterly, he rolled the body to the ooze, pushed it in—

"Some day they'll find him—probably at harvest," Laird thought. "That's too soon. Questions. Won't want to talk about it."

With new intent he stood up. For a moment he surveyed his hands, black, and then tried to lift the right; it dangled uselessly and refused to obey his brain.

"Could be worse," he said with a grimace.

As he walked toward the temple, slowly, he muttered to himself:

"I'll tell a yarn—snake's big as a shrine, eyes of gold and mouth of fire—all that sort of thing. Then I'll put that busted piece of board with a snake on it over Morrison. No peasant'll come within a hundred miles of it. Next year—won't make any difference."

IN THE temple, he stooped wearily, examined the broken wooden ornament, and, turning, started to leave. Midway, he stopped. He said once—

"So that's what—"

The ancient bronze temple-bowl had shattered peculiarly. At the base the split had started and had followed a dual flaw, so that a wedge-shaped piece of bronze had fallen to the floor. It was not this which startled Laird.

On the floor were a half-hundred bits of bright-colored stone; bits blue as summer waters, or brilliant as thousand-faceted mirrors, or lizard-green, or blood-crimson; some were diaphanous and ruby red, others the green of ancient ice—bits of jade, of amethyst, of rubies—a cache as old or older than the temple.

The sides of the great bowl had been curiously wrought. They were hollowed—of two pieces, fused only at the upper rim, and the jewels had been entombed for years—centuries—until they were probably known only as an unbelieved fable. Unbelieved—save by the partly mad Morrison.

Laird stooped and gathered some of them. Light of a thousand colors sprayed forth from the priceless handful. For a moment he was of a mind to lay the gems back on the matting and explore the contents of the bowl; then, with a curious, splendid expression of renunciation, of innate disgust, he dropped the jewels back in the crevice, carefully searched the floor for every gem, picked up the wedge of bronze last, and fitted it into the great bowl.

He tried to lift the bowl—and found that it was impossible, and then surveyed it almost stupidly.

It came to him that to do what he intended—roll the bronze to the rice-field, and sink it, possibly near Morrison, was a mistake. It would be dug up next planting-time, unless he buried it deeply. Well, perhaps some day he would return and do that very thing. Now, however, he worked grimly to revolve the bowl on its huge pedestal, so that the broken portion was near the wall, and in the dark.

It was ten minutes before he was able to complete the labor.

"I'm a mess," he said.

For a moment he wondered who the old Japanese was—the one who had told Morrison the fable which was true. He wondered how Morrison had escaped from prison, how he had managed to get to this lonely north Japan province, who the fellow really was. Why Morrison had become berserk Laird believed he understood; he feared capture and, at the end of it, death for attempting to escape—the more awful because of the wealth within his reach.

No wind crept out of the hills when Laird finally left the shelter of the water-willows. The sun beat hotter than ever. As he ploughed through the mud of the rice-field he was depressed and, for almost the first time in his many years in the East, lonesome.

As his feet found the little hot path leading back to Nagomutsu a new thought brought his head erect.

"What a lot of devilment Morrison'd done if he'd gotten those jewels!" Laird said aloud.

Somewhere in the far hills a bell began to ring—a small echo of the bronze bowl—*honnng! honnng!*

Laird began to walk more quickly along the path, his parched lips pursed into a noiseless whistle.

Once more, by request

Riley Grannan's Last *A*dventure

By Sam C. Dunham

THIS is not fiction. On the face of it, it has no place in a magazine designed to entertain, for it is a funeral sermon. Yet, because its human appeal is so strong, it was first published in this magazine nearly fifteen years ago, and reprinted seven years ago. Those issues were quickly exhausted by the demand for copies of this sermon, and through the years demands for it have continued to come in, demands we could not fill. As you may have noticed in one of our service departments, as much as five dollars has been offered for a single copy of the magazine containing it.

So it seems only common sense to publish again what is so urgently desired and is difficult to obtain. We believe that these words spoken by the Rev. Mr. Knickerbocker over the dead body of Riley Grannan will be equally valued by readers new and old—THE EDITORS.

IN THE desert mining camp of Rawhide, Nev., in the Spring of 1908, there was spoken over the body of a race-track gambler one of the most eloquent panegyrics that have been heard in this generation. That no more highly finished and impressive eulogy had been pronounced at the bier of any man since the immortal discourse of Robert G. Ingersoll at the grave of his brother, was the opinion of the men who heard it—and there were men in that audience whose opinion was worth while.

The man who delivered the oration was Herman W. Knickerbocker, an itinerant minister of the gospel, prospector and mine promoter. It was spoken over the body of Riley Grannan, whose meteoric career as a race-track plunger for years furnished sensations for the newspapers.

The "atmosphere" of the occasion was unique. For an environment there was the bleak, wind-swept desert; for an audience, a motley crowd of adventurers drawn from almost every clime by the lure of gold; for a

theme, the life, not of a multimillionaire, dying peacefully and full of honors in a Fifth Avenue mansion, but of a "busted" gambler, losing his "last chips" in a miner's shack; and the orator, not an overpaid pastor of a billion-dollar congregation, but a humble wanderer from the fold.

The rush of fifty thousand gold-seekers into Rawhide in the Spring of 1908 brought together as remarkable an aggregation of men as ever gathered in so short a time in any mining camp. As if by magic there sprang up a thriving, noisy, bustling city of 12,000 where a few months before the only sound that ever broke the immemorial silence of the desert was the weird cry of the coyote holding its night-long vigil in the barren ghostly hills.

From the four corners of the world and its intervening spaces had come mining engineers of international reputation, young mine promoters, real-estate dealers, millionaire mine operators, merchants, lawyers, journalists, preachers—representatives of every profession and calling—all lured by the irresistible magic of the four-lettered word, "gold."

There were many distinct individual types—men of rare talent, even of genius, others that were ordinary and some very common. On the whole, however, the camp of Rawhide, at its inception, before the advent of the riff-raff of camp followers, contained as fine a body of men as ever foregathered in the West. They represented the true democracy of character which our "higher civilization" has so signally failed to produce in our overgrown cities. Those who live in the artificial atmosphere of a great city can not realize how much the natural—which are the good—impulses of the race dominate individuals in all the relations of life in our Western mining camps. There the search for gold does not have the demoralizing effect that the frenzy for money-grubbing has in the big cities. There, instead of stifling all the finer sentiments—turning men into selfish beasts—as it does in so many instances in a big town, it has the opposite effect, making them generous, big-souled, and humane. There you find all the sterling qualities playing forcefully all the time—divine charity, the greatest thing in the world, and all the good things that grow out of it.

Among the first to be attracted to the camp was Herman W. Knickerbocker. Mr. Knickerbocker was born in Louisiana, the son of an eminent jurist. At the age of twenty-one he was ordained a Methodist minister and became the pastor of a fashionable congregation in New Orleans. He was soon "called" to the Trinity M. E. Church in Los Angeles, where he quickly earned a reputation as one of the most eloquent pulpit orators on the Pacific Coast. His broad and liberal views proved unacceptable to the leaders of the church, however, and he was tried for heresy, but was acquitted. He then resigned.

Having marked dramatic talent, Mr. Knickerbocker decided to adopt the stage as a profession. With this end in view he went to Tonopah in the Spring of 1903 and there erected the Tonopah Opera-House. This enterprise was in advance of the demand for dramatic entertainment, however, and the Opera-House reverted to the Tonopah Lumber Company, sharing the fate of many other too ambitious structures in that camp.

Mr. Knickerbocker then went to work as a common miner and laborer under ground in the Tonopah mines for four dollars a day to support his wife and four children.

DURING his stay in Tonopah Mr. Knickerbocker occasionally gave evidence that he was obsessed with deep-seated and well-nigh overmastering melancholy. He had a lovable, childlike disposition which endeared him to all who knew him. He was usually cheerful, even optimistic, but at times it required all his fortitude to overcome this tendency to melancholy. On one occasion, while he was trying to raise money to do the location work on his Goldfield claims, he went to "Diamondfield" Jack Davis, the most picturesque and one of the most generous characters in camp, and offered to sell him a Colt's forty-five for a few dollars.

"Jack, I don't know whether to sell this gun or to blow my brains out with it," Mr. Knickerbocker said.

Jack, who only a few years before had been sentenced to be hanged for the alleged killing of a sheep-herder up in Idaho but had been pardoned, replied:

"Knick, old boy, you mustn't talk that way. Guns are made to blow the other feller's brains out. You just let me take care o' your'n till you feel better, an' here's fifty dollars to cheer you up a bit. An'

don't never talk to me again about usin' a gun on the wrong man."

When the first news of the great gold strike at Goldfield was brought to Tonopah, Mr. Knickerbocker joined the rush to the new district and located several claims. To provide money to do the location work required by law to hold his claims, he gave a series of Shakespearian readings in Goldfield and Tonopah which were both financially and artistically successful. In these readings his impersonations of "Macbeth" and of two or three other characters showed that he possessed dramatic powers that would have assured him a successful career in the legitimate drama.

Within two years Mr. Knickerbocker made his "clean-up" and left Goldfield with a fortune of about $300,000. For a year he was lost sight of by the people of the camp; but somewhere he must have been an active factor in financial affairs, for at the end of that time he returned to Goldfield broke.

He was among the first to join the stampede to the new camp of Seven Troughs, in northern Nevada and was the first to make a big "clean-up" there.

Half a year later, when the news of the Rawhide discoveries was brought to Reno, Mr. Knickerbocker was found to be "in the thick of it" once more.

Still later, when the camp was at the height of its boom, came Riley Grannan, the famous race-track plunger, who opened a gambling-house that for a time was the most popular resort in the camp. Here some of the biggest stakes ever wagered in the West passed over the tables.

Mr. Grannan, who had made and lost several fortunes on the turf, was dead broke when he reached Reno on his way to Rawhide. He had spent the Winter in San Francisco. When the newspapers began to print the sensational news sent out from Rawhide by the press agents he saw in these dispatches the name of Nat. C. Goodwin, who was the leading operator in the camp, He learned that George Graham Rice was in Reno with the mine-promoting firm of Nat. C. Goodwin & Co. Having known both in his race-track days, he decided to go to Reno and ask them to "stake" him to open a gambling-house in Rawhide.

It is a very common thing in the West for men to stake one another to go into business, particularly when the man asking for a stake has been successful in his line of endeavor. The Tonopah Club at Tonopah had made millions for George Wingfield and his partners. The Northern at Goldfield had made big fortunes for "Tex" Rickard and his associates. What more natural than to believe that a gambling-house in Rawhide, managed by so well-advertised a character as Riley Grannan, would become the most profitable enterprise of its kind in the camp and make a fortune for its owner? It did not take Mr. Grannan long to convince Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Rice that it was good business to stake him and that it was more than likely he would repay them handsomely.

They supplied him with a $20,000 bankroll, taking his notes, without interest, for the amount. First, however, they tried to dissuade him from going to Rawhide. He was just recovering from a long illness and was feeble. They feared he could not stand the rigors of the climate. But he was persistent. He said he could stand any climate "this side of hell." He offered them an interest in the business. They refused to accept it. Their only condition was—

"Return the money when you can."

The enterprise was not a financial success. From the start Mr. Grannan played in bad luck. His resort was jammed with players day and night, but he was a steady loser.

ONE cold, stormy night, unheedful of the warnings of friends, Mr. Grannan walked out of his gambling-house, after a six-hours' sitting at poker, and "took in the town" without wearing an overcoat. As a result of the exposure he fell an easy victim to the prevailing scourge—pneumonia.

When news of Mr. Grannan's illness reached Reno, late the next night, Mr. Rice rushed a noted physician across the desert one hundred and fifty miles to Rawhide in an automobile, at a cost of five hundred dollars. But the physician's efforts were unavailing. Riley "cashed in."

Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Rice defrayed the expenses of Riley's illness and funeral and sent his body to the old home in Kentucky for interment. The bill was eighteen hundred dollars. But no word of their unostentatious generosity in this instance, as in many others that might be cited, was ever given to the press, although they had their grip on the press-agenting of the camp. When the final curtain fell on Riley Grannan's Rawhide drama, his

"angels" had expended about $22,000 on the disastrous venture.

Whenever a miner died in Rawhide, Mr. Knickerbocker officiated at the funeral. The ceremonies on these occasions, although of the simplest character, were always rendered impressive by his heart-stirring words. Therefore no one in Rawhide was surprized when it was announced that Mr. Knickerbocker would perform the rites over the departed race-track plunger.

Indeed, it was most fitting that Herman W. Knickerbocker should say the last words at the bier of Riley Grannan. The two men, born and reared under such different circumstances and following callings so widely divergent, were yet strangely akin in temperament and experiences.

Mr. Knickerbocker was nurtured in luxury and educated for the higher walks of life. He had been the brilliant and idolized pastor of two fashionable congregations. But he had fallen by the wayside, had risen and had fallen again.

Mr. Grannan was born of poor parents. He began life as bell-boy in a Louisville hotel. He was drawn to the race-track by listening to the talk of horsemen when they gathered in Louisville twice a year to attend the races. His career on the race-track was meteoric. But poverty and hardship were nothing new to him.

There was much in common between the two men. Both were generous to a fault. Many stories are told of Mr. Knickerbocker's open-handed generosity to the needy while he lived in Tonopah and Goldfield. It is a tradition of the race-tracks that no one ever applied to Mr. Grannan for aid and was turned away. After Mr. Knickerbocker left the ministry and made his fortune in Goldfield, he ran the gamut of a sporting life. There was in the nature of each a keen appreciation of the higher things of life and neither had sunk so low as not to be able to rise again. No one could realize better than Mr. Knickerbocker the heights and depths of such a nature as Mr. Grannan's.

The funeral was typical of a new mining camp. There was no hearse. The remains were conveyed in an express wagon from the undertaker's tent to the improvised chapel, a variety theater at the rear of the saloon. There gathered an audience so remarkable in aspect that it probably could not be duplicated anywhere else on earth. Men and women of every social station and grade closely commingled. A solemn hush hovered over the strange assembly. Dead silence reigned where a few hours before half-drunken auditors boisterously applauded the ribald jest and obscene songs of low-grade variety actors. But around the bier was gathered a throng of as sincere mourners as ever assembled at the coffinside of a departed friend.

The eulogy pronounced by Mr. Knickerbocker was powerfully dramatic. His appearance was in keeping with the scene. Clad in the rough garb of a miner and wearing high boots, he looked the part of a typical pioneer. He deeply felt his subject. His eyes were dimmed with tears and at times his voice was choked by emotion.

Mr. Knickerbocker spoke without notes. A stenographic report of the oration was made by W. P. de Wolf, a well-known California newspaper man, and sent to Reno the same evening without revision by Mr. Knickerbocker.

Standing on a dais beside the catafalque, with one hand lightly touching the forehead of the dead man and the other uplifted, Mr. Knickerbocker told his auditors he proposed to show the deceased to have been a "dead-game sport" and that he had not lived his life in vain. He went on thus:

I FEEL that it is incumbent upon me to state that in standing here I occupy no ministerial or prelatic position. I am simply a prospector. I make no claims whatever to moral merit or to religion, except the religion of humanity, the brotherhood of man. I stand among you today simply as a man among men, feeling that I can shake hands and say "brother" to the vilest man or woman that ever lived. If there should come to you anything of moral admonition through what I may say, it comes not from any sense of moral superiority, but from the depths of my experience.

Riley Grannan was born in Paris, Kentucky, about forty years ago. I suppose he dreamed all the dreams of boyhood. They blossomed into phenomenal success along financial lines at times during his life. I am told that from the position of a bell-boy in a hotel he rose rapidly to be a celebrity of world-wide fame. He was one of the greatest plungers, probably, that the continent has ever produced.

He died day before yesterday in Rawhide.

This is a very brief statement. You have the birth and the period of the grave. Who can fill the interim? Who can speak of his hopes and fears? Who can solve the mystery of his quiet hours that only he himself knew? I can not.

He was born in the sunny Southland—in Kentucky. He died in Rawhide.

There is the beginning and the end. I wonder if we can see in this a picture of what Ingersoll said at the grave of his brother— "Whether it be near the shore or in mid-ocean, or among the breakers, at last a wreck must mark the end of one and all."

He was born in the sunny Southland, where brooks and rivers run musically through the luxuriant land; where the magnolia grandiflora, like white stars, glow in a firmament of green; where crystal lakes dot the greensward and the softest summer breezes dimple the wave-lips into kisses for the lilies on the shore; where the air is resonant with the warbled melody of a thousand sweet-voiced birds and redolent of the perfume of many flowers. This was the beginning. He died in Rawhide, where in Winter the shoulders of the mountains are wrapped in garments of ice and in summer the blistering rays of the sun beat down upon the skeleton ribs of the desert. Is this a picture of universal human life?

Sometimes, when I look over the circumstances of human life, a curse rises to my lips, and, if you will allow me, I will say here that I speak from an individual point of view. I can not express other than my own views. If I run counter to yours, at least give me credit for a desire to be honest.

When I see the ambitions of man defeated; when I see him struggle with mind and body in the only legitimate prayer he can make to accomplish some end; when I see his aim and purpose frustrated by a fortuitous combination of circumstances over which he has no control; when I see the outstretched hand, just about to grasp the flag of victory, take instead the emblem of defeat, I ask, what is life? What is life? Dreams, awakening, and death; "a pendulum 'twixt a smile and a tear;" "a momentary halt within the waste, and then the nothing we set out from;" "a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more;" "a tale told by an idiot; full of sound and fury, signifying nothing;" a child-blown bubble that but reflects the light and shadow of its environment and is gone; a mockery, a sham, a lie, a fool's vision; its happiness but Dead Sea apples, its pain the crunching of a tyrant's heel. I feel as Omar did when he wrote:

We are no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
Round with the Sun-illumed Lantern held
In Midnight by the Master of the show;
But helpless Pieces of the Game He Plays
Upon this Checker-board of Night and Days
Hither and thither moves, and checks and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.
The Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But Here or There as strikes the Player goes;
And He that toss'd you down into the Field,
He knows about it all—He knows—HE KNOWS.

But I don't. This is my mood.

Not so with Riley Grannan. If I have gaged his character correctly, he accepted the circumstances surrounding him as the mystic officials to whom the universe had delegated its whole office concerning him. He seemed to accept both defeat and victory with equanimity. He was a man whose exterior was as placid and gentle as I have ever seen, and yet when we look back over his meteoric past we can readily understand, if this statement be true, that he was absolutely invincible in spirit. If you will allow me, I will use a phrase most of you are acquainted with. He was a "dead-game sport." I say it not irreverently, but fill the phrase as full of practical human philosophy as it will hold, and I believe that when you can say one is a "dead-game sport" you have reached the climax of human philosophy.

I believe that Riley Grannan's life fully exemplified the philosophy of these verses:

It's easy enough to be happy
When life flows along like a song;
But the man worth while
Is the man who will smile
When everything goes dead wrong.

For the test of the heart is trouble,
And it always comes with the years,
And the smile that is worth
The homage of earth
Is the smile that shines through tears.

I know that there are those who will condemn him. There are those who believe today that he is reaping the reward of a misspent life. There are those who are

dominated by medieval creeds. To those I have no word to say in regard to him. They are ruled by the skeleton hand of the past and fail to see the moral beauty of a character lived outside their puritanical ideas. His goodness was not of the type that reached its highest manifestations in any ceremonial piety. His goodness, I say, was not of that type, but of the type that finds expression in the hand-clasp; the type that finds expression in a word of cheer to a discouraged brother, the type that finds expression in quiet deeds of charity; the type that finds expression in friendship, the sweetest flower that blooms along the dusty highway of life; the type that finds expression in manhood.

He lived in the world of sport. I do not mince my words. I am telling what I believe to be true. In the world of sport—hilarity sometimes, and maybe worse. He left the impress of his character on this world and through the medium of his financial power he was able with his money to brighten the lives of its inhabitants. He wasted it, so the world says. But did it ever occur to you that the most sinful men and women who live in this world are still men and women? Did it ever occur to you that the men and women who inhabit the night-world are still men and women? A little happiness brought into their lives means as much to them as happiness brought into the lives of the straight and good. If you can take one ray of sunlight into their night-life and thereby bring them one single hour of happiness, I believe you are a benefactor.

Riley Grannan may have "wasted" some of his money in this way.

Did you ever stop and think how God does not put all his sunbeams into corn, potatoes and flour? Did you ever notice the prodigality with which he scatters these sunbeams over the universe? Contemplate:

God flings the auroral beauties round the cold shoulders of the North; hangs the quivering picture of the mirage above the palpitating heart of the desert; scatters the sunbeams like gold upon the bosoms of myriad lakes that gem the verdant robe of nature; spangles the canopy of night with star-jewels and silvers the world with the reflected beams from Cynthia's mellow face; hangs the gorgeous crimson current of the Occident across the sleeping-room of the sun; wakes the coy maid of dawn to step timidly from her boudoir of darkness to climb the steps of the Orient and fling wide open the gates of the morning. Then tripping over the landscape, kissing the flowers in her flight, she wakes the birds to herald with their music the coming of her King, who floods the world with refulgent gold. Wasted sunbeams, these? I say to you that the man who by the use of his money or power is able to smooth one wrinkle from the brow of care, is able to change one moan or sob into a song, is able to wipe away one tear and in its place put a jewel of joy—this man is a public benefactor. I believe that some of Riley Grannan's money was "wasted" in this way.

We stand at last in the presence of the Great Mystery. I know nothing about it, nor do you. We may have our hopes, but no knowledge. I do not know whether there be a future life or not. I do not say there is not. I simply say I do not know. I have watched the wicket-gate close behind many and many a pilgrim. No word has come back to me. The gate is closed. Across the chasm is the gloomy cloud of death. I say I do not know. And if you will allow this expression, I do not know whether it is best that my dust or his at last should go to feed the roots of the grasses, the sagebrush or the flowers, to be blown in protean forms by the law of the persistence of force, or whether it is best that I continue in personal identity beyond what we call death. If this be all, "after life's fitful fever, he sleeps well; . . . Nothing can harm him further." God knows what is best.

This may be infidelity; but if it is, I would like to know what faith means. I came into this universe without my volition—came and found a loving mother's arms to receive me. I had nothing to do with the preparation for my reception here. I have no power to change the environment of the future, but the same power which prepared the loving arms of a mother to receive me here will make proper reception for me there. God knows better than I what is good for me, and I leave it with God.

If I had the power today by the simple turning of my hand to endow myself with personal immortality, in my finite ignorance I would refuse to turn my hand. God knows best. It may be that there is a future life. I know that sometimes I get very tired of this life. Hedged and cribbed,

caged like a bird caught from the wilds, that in its mad desire for freedom beats its wings against the bars only to fall back in defeat upon the floor—I long for death, if it will but break the bars that hold me captive.

I was snowbound in the mountains once for three days. On account of the snow we had to remain immediately alongside the train. After three days of this, when our food had been exhausted, the whistle blew that meant the starting of the train out into the world again. It may be that death is but the signal whistle that marks the movement of the train out into the broader and freer stretches of spiritual being. As we stand in the presence of death we have no knowledge, but always, no matter how dark the gloomy clouds hang before me, there gleams the star of hope. Let us hope, then, that it may be the morning star of eternal day. It is dawning somewhere all the time. Did you ever pause to think that this old world of ours is constantly swinging into the dawn? Down the grooves of time, flung by the hand of God, with every revolution it is dawning somewhere all the time. Let this be an illustration of our hope. Let us believe, then, that in the development of the human soul, as it swings forward toward its destiny, it is constantly swinging nearer and nearer to the sun.

And now the time has come to say good-by. The word "farewell" is the saddest in our language. And yet there are sentiments sometimes that refuse to be confined in that word. I will say: Good-by, old man. We will try to exemplify the spirit manifested in your life in bearing the grief at our parting. Words fail me here. Let these flowers, Riley, with their petaled lips and perfumed breath, speak in beauty and fragrance the sentiments that are too tender for words. Good-by.

THERE wasn't a dry eye in the audience when Mr. Knickerbocker finished his masterly discourse. Some of those present, indeed, acted as if spellbound. Surprize at the remarkable performance of the orator was depicted on the countenances of the thoughtful among the hearers.

The coffin was carried to a motor-truck, which was to convey it to the railroad. Silently the pall-bearers, selected from the most prominent residents of the camp, took their places behind the improvised hearse. Then the funeral cortège, embracing nearly every man and woman in Rawhide, slowly wound its way down the cañon, beneath a wintry desert sky.

At the foot of the cañon the procession halted and dispersed, while the motor-truck proceeded across the desert to the railroad station, thirty miles away, whence the body of Riley Grannan was transported to the old home in Kentucky, to be laid to rest "where the magnolia grandiflora, like white stars, glow in a firmament of green; where crystal lakes dot the greensward and the softest summer breezes dimple the wave-lips into kisses for the lilies on the shore; where the air is resonant with the warbled melody of a thousand sweet-voiced birds and redolent of the perfume of many flowers."

And Now

we come to

Gordon Young's

powerful conclusion

of his serial

*Treasure

LIANFO was a copra port. The steamer came but once a month, and news of the outside world was always scarce.

Three men were lying on the beach facing the dark water. They were Old Bill Barnes, bearded and talkative; Old Tom Wateman, small and bandy-legged; and a lazy young beachcomber, Jack Raeburn. All shipmates on the *Dragon;* Will Heddon, master.

Heddon once had business dealings, and a fist fight, with Walscher—a wealthy planter. As Magistrate Davies was Walscher's good friend it was not difficult for him to have Heddon's schooner attached.

This unfortunate occurrence together with rumors of T'eeay Layeen, the Chinese pirate, formed the basis of the seamen's conversation. They spoke eagerly of Heddon's knowledge of an island of treasure, which he would neither affirm nor deny.

Vioux, manager of a miserable troupe of showpeople who were stranded on Lianfo, was in trouble. He had brought a Chinese slave-girl, Po-Shu, to the island and Porpoise Davy—the magistrate—now had her. Vioux wanted Heddon's assistance. There were Chinese who wanted her, too.

So Will Heddon tricked Walscher with treasure talk, persuading him to relinquish his lien on the *Dragon*. Treasure was in the air and men of the beach planned to stow away on the *Dragon* when she sailed.

That night Magistrate Davies was dozing on his porch, when the kidnapers arrived. Heddon tried to talk him into giving up the girl. Insults and reason, logic and jeers, meant nothing to Porpoise Davy. When he was finally tied up, his timid wife, begging mercy for him, led them to Po-Shu's room.

A gust of wind through an open window set shadows dancing as the flame flickered.

"She's gone!" he said. "Been gone—the bed's cold! Looks like the Chinks got her."

As they lurched away through the darkness, Heddon shouted.

"We've some luck anyhow, Jack! There'll be wind enough for our hurry."

Once aboard the ship, after fighting through the rain and bluster of that storm-swept night, the men were turned to. After a tense half-hour the schooner was put over the bar, in pursuit of the Chinese ship thought to carry Po-Shu.

Vioux and Madame questioned Will Heddon about his knowledge of treasure. He told them:

"See here! If I knew of treasure, would I bang and bat about in these islands stealing shell and doing a tramp's odd jobs when with little more than the glint of gold one could live at ease in, say, Paris?"

Then a sudden uproar broke out on the deck above; the stowaways were out! A fierce fight took place for possession of the *Dragon*, ending with Heddon and his crew in charge of a wrecked schooner —topmast, foresail and jib in a jumble on deck. Pelew, ringleader of the beach gang, walked aft to Will Heddon and said—

"Nothin' left to fight for, mister, but a dismasted tub as won't sail."

"You all get to the pumps!" said Heddon. "The boats are smashed and we've got to keep afloat as long as possible."

Madame's great snake, Baal-Phelgor, had the entire crew in terror. Heddon kept his distance with the rest and ordered that no one molest the reptile.

The following morning the first thing sighted was a long-boat.

As they drew near, a tall, finely built Chinese was

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seen in the stern—steering and sculling. The boat pulled alongside and Madame, at the rail, screamed:

"Po-Shu! In the boat there. You will see!"

Denasso was putting in a plea for the protection of the slave-girl from Vioux and Madame when his gaze was drawn shoreward. The *Jack-Girl* was bearing out from Lianfo.

With a frown Heddon turned to watch the Chinese coming aboard. Po-Shu was handed over the side and ran to him, sheltering from Madame's wrath at his side. Will called to the tall Chinese:

"You savvy me talkee? This *nu-ken*. What for you stealum her?"

With but a slight accent the answer came:

"To me was given a ship and men if I would take her from a house. It was the ship, not this woman, that I wanted. The ship sank—"

Denasso drew Raeburn to one side and whispered—

"That Chink—Po-Shu just told me—*T'eeay Layeen!*"

Raeburn, astonished at this new development, rejoined Heddon with the hope of warning him. They were planning to capture the *Jack-Girl*, and Heddon proposed that they turn the snake on Walscher.

Soon the *Jack-Girl* hailed them and sent her boat to take them off. The snake, securely boxed, went with Madame. The next boat-load carried Heddon, who, in the ensuing fight, was chiefly concerned with keeping Pelew from killing any one. As it turned out, the snake was not loosed, since Madame protested so strongly that she lost her wig in the tussle. She ran to hide her shame in a cabin.

The fight was fierce, but brief, and soon the *Jack-Girl's* crew threw down their weapons in surrender and stood dejectedly in the rain.

After settling affairs on their new craft, T'eeay Layeen and Heddon came to an understanding.

Two nights had passed when the *Rose Marie*, a labor-recruiting schooner, hove into hearing. The impetuous Pelew jumped to the rail and shouted:

"We're pirates, you ol' nigger-catcher! An' here's Say Lean, the Chink pirate!"

So when the captain of the *Rose Marie* had taken Walscher and his crew aboard he opened fire with rifles, but a sudden squall split the schooner's mainsail and carried the bark to safety.

Old Bill, badly wounded in the first fight, was cheerfully being nursed by all. Old Tom was even carving him crutches, though not much hope was held for his recovery.

Late that afternoon Heddon came to Old Tom with word that Madame had regained her wig and was once more on deck.

"The minute I saw her I went to throw her *babee*, Baal-Phelgor, overboard. Thank God, her door was locked! When I looked through a port I saw he was loose. Guess she's looking for some one to feed the —— snake!"

Madame was indeed touched to the quick by the discovery of her baldness, and her next move was to flatter Pelew into serving her ends.

The crew began to talk of a Jonah, came to believe that the snake was it. Storms lashed the ship; a fire broke out in the hold; and by the time T'eeay Layeen gave them directions to Kyo Island, where the treasure lay, there seemed to be little chance of their ever reaching it.

With cunning Madame regained the confidence of Vioux, getting him to steal Denasso's opium. The poor drug-slave, coerced to do murder at Madame's behest, chose to jump overboard.

Heddon and T'eeay Layeen came to admire one another's courage and honesty.

T'eeay told him:

"Little Po-Shu wants to be yours. You have her heart, and her heart is a great treasure."

"What would I do with her? I don't want her!" snapped Heddon.

Things came to a head a few days later when the crew came aft and demanded that the snake be thrown overboard. Heddon agreed in spite of Madame's pleas. Finally she ran to her cabin as if to guard Baal-Phelgor.

That night Old Bill died.

The next morning, while Heddon was on watch, the snake attacked Pelew on deck, but Abdul took a hand in the fight, clasping the python's throat in a grip that did not loosen until the men, with axes, had severed the head and cut the constricting folds of snake from Abdul's body—then the strong man sank back, crushed internally, to die in terrible pain.

The huge Abdul was buried with the head of Baal-Phelgor in his shroud, Heddon reading the service.

With the death of the snake the Jonah seemed to be gone, and a steady breeze drove them along on their course. Madame was no longer the same; she never stirred from her room. Something within her had died with her pet.

Soon land was raised—mountainous, jungle-covered islands—where half naked men in proas put off in hope of spoil.

A few nights later the cry "Man overboard!" was raised. Heddon effected a rescue only to find that the seaman, Haskell, had been knifed and probably was dead ere he struck the water. He accused Pelew, then whipped him in a terrific fight.

The next day T'eeay Layeen took over the helm and laid a circuitous course to his island, and when they entered the Hidden Port—through solid walls of rock, so it seemed, the barque was immediately attacked by scores of yelling Chinese.

They met with no resistance and were followed by Layeen's former lieutenant, Shui-Mu, who tells T'eeay Layeen that he is now without followers or honor, as he fled with the treasure of the brotherhood.

Tsing-Ku, who was now in charge of the island, came aboard amidst much ceremony and held court on deck, disposing of the prisoners as fancy suited him. He knew the treasure had not been taken, and that T'eeay Layeen was the only man who knew where the island treasure cave was located. Torture would lead a man to tell all.

So they were all brought ashore and placed in a dungeon behind the Hall of a Thousand Pillars.

The cold laid a definite hold on them, and despair ate into them all. Hours passed. Hours of intense agony.

"What d'ye think of, Will, in this long silence?" said Old Tom.

"Silence? With this blubbering crowd! Call it silence!"

"Me, I put in time killing Chinks!"

VI

HEDDON came out of an unrestful doze and listened, startled. Now there was silence. Not a sound. All seemed dead. Every joint of his body ached, each muscle seemed rigid with cramps; his legs were numb, and the fingers were as if other men's fingers had been stuck on his palms. He shook young Raeburn. The boy stirred and mumbled without awakening. He pushed at Madame, but there was no answering movement; but when he thought she surely must be dead, she sighed.

Old Tom spoke up—

"That you stirrin', Will?"

"Yes."

"I been near mad with wantin' to yell. One lad's tumbled into that hole! I heard a splash an' gurgle, then nothin'! The other lad's been long quiet, too. 'F I hadn't heard ye breathin' I'd gone clear crazy. It ain't nothin' to git killed, but to lay an' starve—how long we been here, Will?"

"I don't know. But this long again, and we won't care. That's somethin' to look forward to!"

"Aye, Will. Nearer ye git to death, the more willin' ye are to give yerself to 'im. But me, I'd like to kill some Chinks first!"

Then Tom broke off into rambling curses; the cursing grew to mutterings, and presently he was quiet.

After a time that may have been a few minutes or a few hours, Old Tom yelled:

"Hy, Will! Will!"

"Now what?"

"I'm goin' crazed! I hear somethin' an'—"

"I was thinkin' the same of myself!"

"But what sounds are they, Will? I never heard their like."

"Echo in these caves plays —— with sound. But they are voices. Chinks yelling, I'd say, like when they brought us in. They're coming now—"

"Will," Tom whispered, almost whimpering like a dog in leash, "do we rush 'em?"

"With cramped legs and every joint stiff? And don't be a fool! They are not splashing through that muck just to see if we're alive. They'll take us out, for if they want us dead they need do nothing more than stay away. Maybe T'eeay Layeen has made a fight and won it!"

Raeburn had awakened and was making sounds of "Oh" and "Ah," saying "Dear God hear me!" and "Oh, help us now!"

Heddon gripped him, hurt him, said angrily with the sound of madness in his voice, utter madness in his words:

"Shut up, —— you! If God is God He hates a man that whines. Here belly-deep in muck, I've said to Him we'd take whatever comes without a whimper and give 'em —— if we got half a chance! That's enough for white men to say, and if no welcome prayer to Him, then let Him damn my soul. I'll make no other!"

Voices came nearer; the Chinese yelled to frighten lurking demons, and demons were there and everywhere about the island as each man knew by the mocking way they caught up every loud sound and flung it about.

The twinkling of lanterns appeared, then a haze of moving shadows; a loud voice cursed, cursed Chinamen.

"P'lew! They're bringin' him!" said Old Tom.

"It's him, Pelew!" said Raeburn.

"Wonder what he's done, they're bringin' him?" asked Tom.

"Quiet," Heddon told him. "We'll learn soon enough."

It was Pelew who came on ahead, and he was cursing violently. He held a lantern, but stumbled over the bamboo grating that had been drawn up; he cursed this, and came on with heavy steps. The Chinese squealed anxiously at him, but he would not have stopped, would have walked right on. Heddon shouted—

"Look out!"

Pelew stopped short, held up the lantern, looked down upon the glistening slime, then stared. He could see nothing but vague black shapes crouched across from him, and the glint of the lantern light was on their eyes. They looked like negroes.

"——! You fellers! How've you stayed alive?"

"Ye'll learn when ye've joined us!" Old Tom told him.

"Not me in that hole!" Nearly every other word was an oath, violent and bitter. "Not much! There'd be dead Chinks from here to China first! I'm sick o' the stinkin' —— yeller-bellies. I've seen worse things than this the las' three days, but this is ——! At that ye're lucky men not to ha' got worse! ——! They cut men up alive. The dirty, lousy, stinkin' dogs! I'm glad they don't know what I call 'em, after what I seen 'em do to fellers! Tsing-Ku sent for you las' night. Chinks he sent were scairt to come in here! Come back an' said you fellers were all dead—'Ow, it was awful what he done to them! Ever'thing's been awful! You'll see! That's why they're bringin' you — to see Say-Lean be chopped alive, ever' night, 'fore ever'body, while that Tsing-Ku sets an' eats! Music—like cats fightin'. He sets an' eats! —— his soul! Ow, you'll see! Here, you dirty, yeller, stinkin' monkeys, turn-to an' set this gang-plank!"

He squeezed back among the five or six men with him, swore at them; and they with much chattering, grunting, squealing stooped, pushed and with ramming shoves worked the bamboo grating across.

"Out o' the way!" said Pelew, pushing among them, and he went over with reckless ape-like stride, carrying his lantern; and its light was dazzling to eyes that had been three days and nights in the dark.

Pelew, though his clothes were now filthy from the ooze he had tramped through and brushed against, wore Chinese dress. He was unarmed, or seemed to be. He swung the lantern up blindingly into Heddon's face and said:

"I've got to smash you jus' to show 'em we're not friends. They think I'm cussin' you, an' this here's to make 'em think I'd kill you if I could!"

With that, he slapped Heddon. The Chinese made shrill sounds of laughter, approvingly. Truly this Po-Loo of theirs was a brave man.

"Pelew," said Heddon, taking a moment to get his bearings, for the slap had been a hard one, and Heddon, instinctively jerking his head, had bumped against the low rocks overhead, "Pelew, that's a dirty piece of work unless what you say is truth. But I've never known you to lie, so—"

"Lie, me? That's all I been doin' for three days now! I've had that cook chatterin' like a loose block in a gale, tellin' lies to Tsing-Ku! Said I could navigate an' am an expert gunner. Said f'r killin' an English off'cer I'd be hung if caught, so bein' a pirate with his brave Chinks is like pardon to me! But ——, I'm soured on Chinks! Don't like the way they stink. I can't eat their —— food an' I puked like a sick dog after they burned alive that coolie that come with us. They done it to make Say-Lean give in! But not him! He's a white man. You ought to see the way he takes his pain! You will see. It's him as is gettin' you out. So out you come!

I've got to smash you again, jus' to show 'em all this talk is cusses!"

He lifted the lantern and struck Heddon again with open palm. The blow was ringing. The Chinamen saw it, heard it, and squealed again.

"Don't take it, Will!" Old Tom cried and with every joint stiff and muscle sore, he braced himself to fight.

Pelew turned on him, held up the lantern blindingly, said:

"Shut up, you—I'll hit you nex', an' you're the only man on that —— bark I liked! But you don't know Chinks like I do—an' they're watchin' me! —— yeller monkeys. My belly's sour o' them. Their food is rotten. They stink. They row an' squeal. They burned a lad an' laughed at his howls—Ow, the smell of it! They chop up livin' men—you'll see! I'm better off than you fellers, but I've had ——, too! Where's the other lads?"

"Dead," said Heddon.

"Went crazy," said Old Tom.

"Madame is here," said Heddon. "Hold over your lantern and see if she lives."

"Here, that lady? In a hole like this!"

Pelew swore wrathfully, turned about, stooped and lowered the lantern almost against the face of Madame who lay against the rock. She was blackened with ooze and seemed dead.

At her side lay little Vioux, open-eyed and lifeless. His had not been the strength of heart and body to stand a chill that had in it so much fear. The mud on his face made it appear that the scraggly growth of beard was now thick and black enough to hide his features from those who knew him well in Paris, and even in death his open eyes had a twisted look as if he might try tricky evasion on even God Himself.

"She dead?" asked Pelew.

"Wasn't an hour or so ago," said Heddon.

"Let's see 'f she's dead. She done me wrong, an' so'd you, an' so's most ever' man I ever knowed. But here we're all in —— together, an' here I like fellers I hate more'n I like these —— Chinamen. I don't know what's ahead f'r me 'r you, but bring 'er to if she ain't dead."

Madame was not dead, but she was at peace. Her mind was gone. She opened her eyes and looked about, no longer frightened and no longer miserable. Her strong body clung to life, but her brain had refused longer to accept the pain and anguish that came tingling upon it. She did not know them, know where she was, or care. Heddon said, "Stand up," and "Come, we must hurry," but there was no movement. She stared, tried to stare into the lantern-light, and looked up at Heddon, blankly, not resisting but not moving until he said, "*Dêpêchons-nous, Madame!*" That she understood. She tried to rise, but her legs were numb. She could not stand. Pelew stared in a kind of blank-eyed fascination and cursed in pity.

"Here, take this," he said, and held out the lantern.

Heddon took it; then Pelew bent over, gathered her up, and started, saying—

"Come on, let's get out o' here!"

Heddon walked beside him, trying to help him with the woman's weight; and with the Chinese pattering ahead—since demons were most likely to seize those who went ahead in entering, those behind in withdrawing from the tunnel-passage—they followed, slipping and stumbling. Pelew was squat and powerful. He laid the woman over his shoulder. With use, Heddon's muscles returned flexibly to their strength, and as best he could he held the lantern down for Pelew's feet and held a hand against Pelew to steady him. Much of the way Pelew was silent, but when he spoke he cursed, cursed Chinamen.

CHAPTER XV

THE HALL OF THE THOUSAND PILLARS

THE Hall of the Thousand Pillars was low of ceiling, always dim, chill and murky. chambers and passageways opened into it from all sides. It was here that the pirates assembled at the share-by-share distribution of loot, and though it might be suspected that their commanders had already fingered the plunder, there was great pretense of communal honesty.

It was here, too, that the pirates were at times assembled to hear the findings of soothsayers, for the crews would usually sail off bravely on that voyage of which the magicians had foretold success—so ingenious were the soothsayers in putting blame elsewhere than upon themselves if the prophecies miscarried. The soothsayers had indeed been so skillful at fortune-telling that they knew plenty of bad luck awaited

themselves if they did not prophesy according to the plans and designs of T'eeay Layeen in the days when he was Lord of the Island. With his own hands and a silver cord he had once strangled a soothsayer for predicting that an attack would be unsuccessful; but so strong was superstition among the Chinese sailors that not even T'eeay Layeen dared order the attack until a second soothsayer, having consulted the auguries of Feng-Shui—and been shown the silver cord—pronounced victory in advance.

It was in this Hall of the Thousand Pillars that Tsing-Ku publicly, ceremoniously, tortured T'eeay Layeen, and the soothsayer, a fellow with a scraggly patch of chin whiskers and eyes deep within a wrinkled face, had made a guess at how long this man called the Iron One could endure the torture, and foretold that by the fourth night T'eeay Layeen would show where lay the treasure chamber.

"If not," said Tsing-Ku, "the death of *ling che* falls upon you!"

As the *ling che* is both painful and disgraceful the old soothsayer had anxiously and with increasing agony watched T'eeay Layeen, possessed of the Devil, for three days and nights eat his pain in silence. Inch by inch the fingers of his left hand had been cut away, the bones of his fingerless left hand broken, the hand then cut away at the wrist.

The pain of it T'eeay Layeen had endured without a murmur. Night after night Tsing-Ku sat publicly at table, with friends about him, with music in his ears, entertainers on the carpet before him, and though he drank wine and laughed noiselessly, he chewed upon his own heart out of sheer anger and bafflement.

Tsing-Ku, master of cunning, had this problem to work out:

He had promised T'eeay Layeen life and freedom if he would speak of treasure; he knew that dread of mutilation, more than pain, would affect T'eeay Layeen; yet the mutilation must not go so far as to make T'eeay Layeen cease to value life and so, sullenly, die.

The fortitude of T'eeay Layeen exasperated not only Tsing-Ku but all the pirates; they would have liked to flay him from the crown of his head and cut him into ten thousand pieces, after the manner of the emperor's justice upon parricides; but that would have placed the great silence upon T'eeay Layeen—and they wanted that he should speak. Thus it was that the victim baffled his tormentors, who dared not greatly weaken him for fear that he would die.

At last from his place of torture in the Hall of the Thousand Pillars T'eeay Layeen spoke and was heard by all those crowded about in the shadows to watch him suffer:

"What I have sworn, I have sworn; and if I broke the Sacred Oath of Friendship to ease my torture here, I would suffer in the Hall of Judgment where gods teach men pain!

"Let my friends, the white men, be brought before me unharmed. Let me hear your promise that they will be given life and safety. Then will I lead the way to the treasure chamber. But if they come before me famished and tortured, with hands bound and wounds upon their bodies, kill me with the Lingering Death as you will, for I die in silence. Such is my oath, recorded with the gods in the Hall of Judgment!"

This T'eeay Layeen had said within the hearing of all men.

Tsing-Ku, the most penetratively suspicious of cunning men, brooded deeply. He knew very well that T'eeay Layeen had no such love as that of foreign devils; so in casting about for what motive lay behind this singular oath, he consulted his soothsayer, not because the fellow was a prophet but because he had a wily understanding of human nature.

The soothsayer, with the threat of the *ling che* hanging over him, said that T'eeay Layeen thought the white men had been put to death, and so could not be brought into the Hall; and if they could not be brought into the Hall, he would use that as his reason for dying in silence. Then all the pirate crews, cheated of their share in the treasure, would be angered at Tsing-Ku. There was nothing to do, said the soothsayer anxiously, but to bring the foreign devils.

This was not an illogical deduction, as it was nothing unusual for a Chinese to kill himself so that an enemy might be blamed for having harassed him to death, and be punished for that death.

Tsing-Ku, to whom lies came easily, had all along said that Heddon was being given the care of a favored guest because after

much reconsideration he had agreed to serve as Tsing-Ku's pilot.

What T'eeay Layeen thought no man knew, for he made no answer; and having stood for three nights tied before a chopping block, in the midst of men whom he had often led to victory, without now having voice or arm lifted in his behalf, likely enough his iron heart grew weak enough to believe that Heddon too had yielded to the fear of life and eagerness for treasure.

Nevertheless T'eeay Layeen at last made his oath and promise; and Tsing-Ku had the white devils brought from the place of the Black Silence; he ordered that they be washed, dressed, fed and allowed to sleep through the day. The first Chinese who had been sent to fetch the prisoners were so fearful of the demons and ghosts of the many who had died that they reasoned among themselves: Those cowardly foreign devils are surely dead by this time; let us return and say so. Better for us that T'eeay Layeen die without speaking than that we should be seized by demons!

They returned, said the white men were dead, and were beaten with bamboo until confession revealed they had not ventured to the end of the passage. Then Tsing-Ku sent Pelew with the next party; for though white men are more cowardly than yellow, they do not fear the same things, being outrageously indifferent to demons and ghosts.

II

THAT night five men with drawn swords took Heddon, Old Tom, Raeburn and, since there were no orders specifying otherwise, Madame too, into the Hall of the Thousand Pillars. The guards held their naked swords without menace but with a certain pride, for on the island only men on duty carried arms since a surprize attack was impossible and a quarrel among themselves with weapons in hand meant death for each brawler. The guards pressed through a crowd that did not readily give way; those who had places of vantage did not like being jostled and moved aside.

The crowd had begun to gather before sunset, crouching down into the nearest places they were permitted to use, and waited patiently, smoking, gambling, cracking nuts, spitting the hulls of seeds about, babbling with the *ong-pong-knong* sounds and wavering inflections of China.

Somewhat near the center of the Hall rugs had been spread, a table was set, and at the head of the table was a great carved chair like a throne.

Less than twenty feet from the table was the heavy block and wooden post to which T'eeay Layeen was tied by the neck, night after night, like an animal, that his humiliation might be greater; and here he must stand in pain while Tsing-Ku dined, drank, laughed, talked with companions, watched jugglers, acrobats, magicians, and at times glanced toward the candle ringed with black. When the melting of the candle obliterated a ring he would make a signal; a hush would come upon the Hall, and the executioner, with his heavy curved sword, then advanced to T'eeay Layeen. At a word, T'eeay Layeen would put forth his left hand upon the block. Lifting his sword, Li Neng the executioner, as one vain of his dexterity, would hold it suspended for a moment, then with a tumbling, whirling flourish, chop. At once a physician and attendants who waited close by bound the fresh wound that loss of blood might not drain away T'eeay Layeen's life.

This was as cruel a thing as the cruel Tsing-Ku could imagine, for had he imagined anything more cruel, he would have made use of the greater humiliation, the more biting torture. T'eeay Layeen knew that if he did not speak he would be relentlessly mutilated, tiny bit by bit, night after night, until he died of exhaustion or there remained but an armless, legless trunk.

The guards brought Heddon and his companions out some few paces farther than the place where the crowd was allowed to squat; and thus having good places for themselves, they returned the swords to their belts and sat down cross-legged, smoking, talking with friends behind them, ignoring the prisoners as could be safely done, for they were stared at by hundreds of eyes that peered through the shadowy flare of torches and smoky lamps placed on niches of the columns.

III

THERE was a buzzing stir among a part of the crowd; it gave way with a willing struggle as men, crying out in eager loudness to show respect, pushed back one on another. Tsing-Ku, in resplendent robes, with attendants and captains, chief among

them being Shui-Mu, the Jelly-Fish, advanced with leisurely unconcern to his place at the head of the table.

He glanced about with seeming indifference, but watchfully noted everything. Heddon stood tall and glowering, Old Tom blinked savagely into the staring faces and young Raeburn was nervously sullen. It was agreed among them that at a word from Heddon they were to snatch away the swords from their guards and make a fight that would be victorious if they could get themselves killed without being put to the torture. They did not expect to win anything but quick death, and they now felt like men sentenced to be executed.

The last thing Pelew had said to Heddon that morning was:

"I don't know what's ahead for you fellers or f'r me. But if I had a brother an' hated 'im, still I'd tell 'im to do what I'm tellin' you. Grab a sword an' kill 'em, make 'em kill you! They'll burn you alive or somepin. Me, I got a gun hid on me—an' first Chink looks cross-eyed at me, I shoot 'im. Then God help me! I ain't goin' be tortured—not by no —— yeller monkeys, I ain't! I hid that gun on me the day the bark got in here—you forgot to throw them guns overboard like you said. An' that day I'd ha' shot Tsing-Ku, if he hadn't took me for a friend, like he done. He won't let men here have guns. Afraid somebody'll pot him from the dark, I guess. Awful coward. Mister, I'm tellin' you, don't let 'em torture you—you'll see the way they chop up Say-Lean!"

Heddon stood with his back against one of the stone pillars; above him a torch flared, blackening the ceiling, showering particles of fine ash; and though uncertain, suspicious, ready at any moment for anything, he looked with scowling interest at all he saw.

Tsing-Ku was dressed in yellow robes, blouse, scarf and skirt, as if he were indeed of royal blood; the sleeves were long, and every hand's breath of all the cloth he wore was heavily embroidered. He wore a conical cap. He sat down with an air of serene ease. With graceful slowness, as if aware of the delicate beauty of his hands, he stroked his long thread of a mustache as he spoke to one or another of the three men who took places at the tables.

Among the attendants were some servants who stood near the table, watchful for word or gesture; there were two others who held gongs that they might beat for silence if Tsing-Ku chose to speak for all to hear. There were some ten or twelve men with swords in belts and in their hands long pikes with heads of broad curved blades.

Tsing-Ku would have liked the show of a viceroy's entourage, but knew that such a show would not have been well thought of by the pirates since all were, or were supposed to be, Sea Brothers; and as the pirates themselves were not allowed to go about armed on the island, he was attended by only a small guard that he might have always at hand men to execute immediately such punishment as sudden occasion required.

Heddon saw that among those who had entered with Tsing-Ku, but remained standing apart in the background, were Woo Lung, cook of the bark *Jacienta*, and Pelew in Chinese dress and looking sullen.

IV

THE Hall was startled into silence by the first blow on a gong—one reverberant crash of brass followed by another from the second gong, answered by the first, and so on until many blows had been struck; and these echoes pealed through the Hall and died away against far off and unlighted walls.

There was no other sound. It was as if these yellow men held their breath as they peered into the darkened spaces.

A tiny wavering light seemed to splash up in the remote darkness. This drew low, eager murmuring out of the motionless crowd banked in the shadows; and presently there came into view a limping cripple, a torch in one hand, a rope in the other, and behind him followed T'eeay Layeen, tied by the neck.

This was the most degrading entrance that Tsing-Ku could devise for his fallen enemy. The guards that gave T'eeay Layeen over to the cripple were even kept from sight so it might appear that this mere deformed wretch, alone, brought the terrible T'eeay Layeen from his prison into the Hall of Tsing-Ku's Judgment.

Silently, and in the midst of silence, the cripple with slow hobbling led T'eeay Layeen to the wooden post, threw down his torch, tied T'eeay Layeen to the post, then, grinning broadly, hobbled to one side and squatted down.

The flesh of T'eeay Layeen might be cut away and his bones cracked; he might be led by a cripple into the presence of those whom he had once commanded; he might have his neck lacerated by a rope and be tied like a donkey to a post; but still men knew that he was proud and his pride unbroken. But they could not admire this fortitude since it cheated them of treasure.

T'eeay Layeen had entered and now stood as if he saw no one, noticed nothing, because there was nothing worthy of his notice. His aloofness, all knew, was affected, a manner put on; but a perfect manner. His air of scorn was so lofty that it did not seem to be scorn, but a serene composure. His mutilated arm hung at his side, quite like something that did not belong to him—any more than the rags in which he was dressed.

In the silence of the Hall, Tsing-Ku, smiling slightly as if with great satisfaction, looked steadily at T'eeay Layeen; then lifting his arm, with graceful turn of wrist, pointed toward Heddon and said:

"My mercy is great. That you may no longer make yourself suffer, there are the men whose presence here releases you from your oath. Now speak, or by the grave of my father, before this night is over you will howl!"

Just as if he had not before noticed Heddon, T'eeay Layeen looked toward him, but gave no indication of either surprize or pleasure. He stood some twenty feet from Tsing-Ku, as many from Heddon; and he did not know whether Heddon was a true man or false, but knew a way to learn and at once called boldly:

"When I give the shout, seize swords, cut me loose and follow! You will do that!"

"Aye! But I want to get that yellow devil there—"

"He wears armor! Strike at head or throat!" said T'eeay Layeen, without a trace of expression on his face, with his face not even toward Heddon.

More might have been said, but at the first words Tsing-Ku cried for silence, then with gestures too quick to be graceful, signaled for the gongs to beat rapidly that there might be no more talk. The reverberant noise was deafening and continued until Woo Lung, summoned, came to his chair.

"What have they said?" demanded Tsing-Ku. "You heard? You could hear?"

"Every word, O Royal One. T'eeay Layeen cried out, 'When I shout from pain men will seize swords and put you to death. I suffer that you may have peace!' The foreign devil answered, 'Woe to me that I shall be killed when I might have followed the banner of the princely one in yellow robes!' It was thus they spoke, O Son of the Dragon!"

Woo Lung bowed low, humbly indifferent to his own fate. It was his belief that these men, at the signal of T'eeay Layeen's shout, meant to plunge wildly to their death. He wished them peace, for they were friends. He, being old and made wise by much disappointment, leaned in his friendliness toward those whom he admired, not toward those who were cruel and powerful.

Tsing-Ku meditated behind a thoughtful smile, looking steadily at Heddon and slowly stroking his mustache. He knew men and the cowardliness of men; like a great and cunning musician, he could, or thought he could, play upon men's fears, their avarice, their suspicions, their cowardice, upon their weak and evil passions. He now with brooding cunning considered the best, or rather the worst, way to strike the proud heart of T'eeay Layeen. That Tsing-Ku had already lied about Heddon's willingness to serve as his pilot, and T'eeay Layeen now knew that he had lied, meant nothing to Tsing-Ku, who was a born diplomat, and so said at any time what seemed best to serve his purpose.

To the humble Woo Lung, whose eyes appeared dazzled by the radiance of the yellow robes, Tsing-Ku said—

"So he, the big foreign devil, has cursed the day he drew upon himself the anger of Tsing-Ku?"

"O, Lord of the Sea, it is so."

"Now say to him that having felt my anger, he may feel my favor if he will join my men. Say to him that he must show himself devoted to me by taking the sword and striking T'eeay Layeen's wrist from his arm. Say to him that he and his friends will then all be treated with courtesy. Say those things to him."

Woo Lung with shuffling steps unhappily advanced some paces nearer to Heddon, and with eyes half veiled by drooping lids, spoke:

"Tsing-Ku him say him makee you big cabtun all samee lich man—"

Heddon, angered and mystified, listened, hardly understanding.

"—'nother time you no hab got one-piecee plopa chancee get him to like you. You takeum swo'd cut T'eeay Layeen, chop! So?"

"The time has come!" said Heddon, and saying that gave Old Tom a kick; and Old Tom nudged Raeburn who was half-crouched as if fear and weakness bore him down, but crouching, he got that much nearer to the Chinaman squatting near his feet. Raeburn's lowered eyes were fixed on the Chinaman's sword hilt.

"You do this time all-samee Tsing-Ku say, eh?"

"You're right I will!" said Heddon. "Let him give me a sword, I'll go there now and cut him up. Tell him so!"

Woo Lung's drowsy lids widened. He understood what Heddon meant to do, and his old heart beat the faster. He said, "Maskee!" and returning to the chair of Tsing-Ku, explained:

"O Brother of the Dragon, the low born foreign devil, having tasted your sublime punishment, has grown wise and would drink of your kindness. But give him a sword and he will do as you wish, even to taking the head of T'eeay Layeen, as he would take the head of all your enemies!"

Tsing-Ku nodded, pleased. He felt that he had made a move worthy of his skill in craft. That T'eeay Layeen had not offered to show the way to the treasure when he saw the white men there was no disappointment to Tsing-Ku who had not expected him to keep such a promise, but now he taunted him:

"Is it thus you think to jest with me because for three nights I have shown you mercy? You said this night that you would speak. Speak then!"

T'eeay Layeen by neither word nor sign made answer.

"You thought these foreign devils were dead and thought to make their death your reason for not speaking of treasure so that the Sea Brothers would give me blame for having let them die! I told you that they lived as favored guests, and wished to serve me. Your blind eyes shall be opened to the truth. From this night on the one you favored most shall take the place of Li Neng!"

Woo Lung had bowed low, and holding the bow, moved back from the table and returned to his place again near Pelew. His wrinkled old face was as expressionless as his wrinkled palm, though he knew now Tsing-Ku would soon learn that he had been a faithless interpreter. Woo Lung impassively reflected: What is life but the school in which a man learns how to die? And what is death but the doorway through which the worthy man passes into the companionship of his blessed ancestors?

Then Pelew pulled hard at Woo Lung's sleeve, whispering in bold excitement:

"What's up? There's som'pin up! You didn't tell Tsing-Ku what all they said! I know you didn't else he'd ha' got up out o' that chair a-hoppin'! All Heddon's after is to get his hands on that sword! I know that feller."

"You tell um maybe? Tsing-Ku? You tell um Woo Lung tell um lie?"

"Me? I tell 'im nothin'. I don't like 'im! But why are you helpin' 'em? You're only goin' get yourself in trouble? Don't you know that? ——! I thought you had some sense!"

Said Woo Lung, the fallen scholar—

"The gods judge the heart of man by his kindness, not by his wealth."

But as he said it in Chinese, Pelew did not understand; and had he said it in English, Pelew would have understood no more than he did in Chinese.

V

TSING-KU, who knew that only the most patient men can inflict the cruelest torture, seemed to forget T'eeay Layeen while Heddon stared expectantly waiting, impatiently watching him eat and drink with his companions. They were merry.

A juggler had trotted in with a bundle of sticks and a basket of balls and arranged them on the carpet spread on the floor between the post where T'eeay Layeen stood tied by the neck and the table where Tsing-Ku and his companions feasted.

The juggler, and such other performers as nightly showed their tricks, amused and entertained the pirate crew while the tall candle burned down from one black ring to another; and T'eeay Layeen could see the wax melt and drip as if symbolizing the wearing away of his own flesh.

Through the hall, lamps flickered and torches burned with spluttering flare.

The juggler had played out his tricks,

gathered up his sticks and balls and departed; then in there came a man with a small monkey on a string; the loop was about its neck, and its master called it T'eeay Layeen. This caused shrill laughter and a moment's jabbering in the crowd. The laughter seemed to startle the monkey, which did fantastic tricks, all the while turning its sad face this way, that way, as if watching out for hidden enemies.

While the monkey was capering the candle sank to a black ring. Voices murmured impatiently, and with rising boldness became like a sinister chant calling Tsing-Ku's attention to the Ring of Punishment.

Tsing-Ku, with a movement of his wrist signaled. A gong struck, was answered by a second gong; the blows fell slowly on one, then the other, like the tolling of a bell. Their sound ran through the hall and seemed to vanish with shuddering echoes in the outer darkness. The man and monkey left quickly.

A stirring movement trembled through the crowd; some stood up, the better to see; some shifted about into more comfortable postures; there was a craning and stretching of necks and bodies, a wriggling and quiet jostling.

The tolling of the gongs went on, with gradual softening of blows. Tsing-Ku was theatrical and patient, the master of a kind of hovering delay that kept men expectant.

Woo Lung, now summoned, approached and as always, stopped humbly just behind Tsing-Ku's elbow at the side of Tsing-Ku's heavy carved chair. Tsing-Ku paused; he had the leisureliness of a man sipping fine wine, seemed reluctant to have the pleasure over with and done. He smiled slightly, looking first at Heddon then at T'eeay Layeen, and again at Heddon. At last he spoke, saying quietly:

"Take the sword of Li Neng. Put it into the hand of that man who now stands like an image of stone—" this with slow flowing movement of dainty hand toward Heddon—"say to him that he is to go to T'eeay Layeen, and with one blow cut from his arm a piece no larger than twice the width of his own thumb. The men who serve Tsing-Ku must not shrink from the sight of blood. Say that to him, for it seems that now he turns a little more pale than foreign devils are at birth."

Tsing-Ku's table companions laughed at this bit of wit. Shui-Mu rubbed his jelly-fish belly to show how warm it was with pleasure and twisted about in his chair that he might watch the better.

The tolling of the gongs had died away; the hall was hushed. The sound of a low-spoken voice would have been heard afar, so vibrantly tense was the stillness.

Woo Lung, unhurriedly, humbly, approached Li Neng, the executioner, who held the long heavy crescent-bladed sword and bowed with both hands extended. Li Neng was not pleased at having another delegated to step into full view of all the people and strike the blow it had been his privilege to strike; and grudgingly he gave over the sword, saying loud enough to be overheard—

"It will take much blood to wash off the stain of a foreign dog's touch!"

Woo Lung, not one step faster or slower than his usual pace, walked in the midst of silence and stopped before Heddon; he bowed low with both arms extended, presenting the sword of the executioner and said:

"Blave man, you die now. Blave T'eeay Layeen him die-lo too. Old me, die some time. Makee die now all samee die by-an'-by. You take um swo'd, makee him loosee. All hellee bleak loose—maskee!"

Heddon grasped the sword. He said: "Tom, you and Jack stand by! Before this fight is done they'll know why white men rule the earth!"

"Aye!" Old Tom growled softly, and Raeburn sank lower as if greatly afraid, and his body trembled, but his downcast eyes were on a sword hilt.

Heddon stepped forward toward T'eeay Layeen and would not look to the right or left. He knew that every eye was upon him, noting every move, every muscle-quiver, and he was actually conscious of fear that these hard-peering eyes might detect his thoughts and cry out in alarm.

T'eeay Layeen stood motionless and gazed at him, perhaps even now stung with a trace of doubt, lest this man after all give way to fear of death and serve Tsing-Ku. T'eeay Layeen was in rags, but clothed in imperial yellow his bearing would not have been more imperious. Suffering and anguish had made his lean body more lean; his face had shrunk, but his head was up, and the eyes blazed. Now his lips showed the curve of scorn as if thus he greeted one who betrayed him.

T'eeay Layeen put out his handless arm, bound tightly at the stump that he might not suffer loss of blood, and he laid it on the block.

The silence in the Hall was as if every man there had been struck dead. Heddon extended the blade to the block as if measuring the distance carefully, cast a quick oblique glance at the rope and stepped back, then paused and looked doubtfully at three men who moved quietly up behind T'eeay Layeen. One of them held a brazier of live coals. They were the doctor and his two attendants. This next wound was not to be bound, but to be seared with fire that T'eeay Layeen might not so indifferently await the stroke of the sword. Heddon did not like the presence of these men, and his pause was to determine whether to begin by striking them aside or first to cut the rope.

Then began a sudden babbling, a bustling, high-pitched excited sing-song voices and cries of wonderment.

Heddon, with sword lifted, glanced over his shoulder and saw the little Po-Shu, dressed and bejeweled like a princess, glide swiftly past the men who made way for her, and with laughing boldness she ran toward Tsing-Ku.

Heddon turned to strike, to cut the rope; but T'eeay Layeen, being tethered so that he might shrink if at any time his courage failed him—might shrink away and be laughed at—had now stepped back and slightly aside, and with upraised hand he checked the upraised sword that was lifted as if to split T'eeay Layeen's head.

The Chinese cried out in confused, alarmed protest. Heddon looked fierce and angry enough to take off T'eeay Layeen's head, and the way he held the sword made them think that was what he had in mind. Tsing-Ku shifted his amazed glance from Po-Shu, who had dared come unbidden, and gazed with startled anxiousness toward Heddon; but there was pleasure in Tsing-Ku's alarm, for T'eeay Layeen seemed to be shrinking as if he did indeed fear death.

In the midst of the clamor, Shui-Mu got from his chair with jerky bustling and ran to Heddon, talking rapidly in high-pitched protest, and almost got his own head split then and there; but in the midst of this excitement, Heddon heard T'eeay Layeen say:

"Wait! Wait! The gods have heard! Wait!"

Heddon frowned angrily and mystified, but lowered the sword and gazed about him doubtfully.

Little Po-Shu had run up toward Tsing-Ku; but orders were orders with the guards that attended him, and these pikemen who permitted none to approach Tsing-Ku unless he had summoned the person, lowered the points of their pikes at her breast.

Instantly she fell to her knees, placed her forehead on the floor and remained motionless, but her sweet voice carried pleasant words to him:

"O Lord of my Life, be not angry! This night the Merciful Goddess heard my prayer, and my ankle became strong. I put upon my poor miserable body the wonderful gifts received from your hands and came to you, though I am unworthy to be looked upon by your lordly eyes. O Lord of Life, be not unmindful that I promised to dance before you that very moment that strength came again into my broad ugly feet; and had I not come, as I have come, I would have been a faithless woman, forgetful of her promise to the Lord of Life! If I have angered the Sun of my Days, let me die!"

Tsing-Ku gazed down questioningly, but did not speak. He glanced from side to side out of the corners of his eyes, hardly knowing whether to be displeased or greatly pleased. Po-Shu was supposed to have an injured ankle; she had slipped on the stone floor the day she had been brought ashore, and had seemed to lie helpless, in great pain, with tears in her dark eyes that showed how much she suffered. The pain was now gone; she had entered with laughter; and it might give T'eeay Layeen much misery to see this girl, whom he had greatly valued, dance happily before him.

But now there was something of even more importance to be given attention for at last he had seen T'eeay Layeen shrink from the sword; so with a gesture and a word he commanded that Po-Shu be taken to one side. Two of the pikemen approached, stooped, one at each arm, and raised her. She gave a frightened glance at each of their faces, then dropped her head and did not again look up as they took her aside.

Tsing-Ku raised his hand; the gongs struck for silence, and when there was a

breathless silence within the Hall, he spoke:

"Why does the brave T'eeay Layeen now shrink from the kiss of the sword? By giving over wealth that is not his to keep concealed, he may have ease and peace. Yet no answer? Ah, not though he has seen how faithless are foreign devils in their gratitude? No answer? Then hear me, you who flinch from steel! When this man you called your friend has pledged his loyalty to me in your own blood, then you shall have better entertainment than jugglers and monkeys on a string. Po-Shu shall dance for you! Put forth that stump of an arm!"

T'eeay Layeen took one long step forward. He placed the mutilated arm on the block, and looking hard at Heddon, said: "Strike! Strike here!"

"I'll see myself in —— first!"

"Fool of a man!" said Teeay Layeen fiercely. "Strike! Strike as I command!"

He dared not say, lest he betray himself, that the treasure-hearted Po-Shu had come to kill Tsing-Ku; and that with Tsing-Ku dead, he could with ten words sway this despicable crowd into abject humbleness. All he could say was:

"Strike! One blow more, your own, now! It will be the last ever to fall on me! Strike, or we perish! Strike!"

"You mean it? I don't know what it's all about! God help me if—"

Heddon struck.

There were clamorous gleeful cries. Tsing-Ku, who had frowned at so much talk between them, now smiled slightly, satisfied.

The physician, a fellow with horn spectacles and chin whiskers, stepped up quickly, and taking the unresisting arm of T'eeay Layeen thrust its stump into the brazier of live coals.

VI

HEDDON stood grimly not more than one pace behind the post to which T'eeay Layeen was tied; he meant to wait and not move from there; and he was so much like a grim executioner awaiting his next summons that Tsing-Ku noticed him with approval.

Tsing-Ku sipped wine from a jade cup, spoke pleasantly to his companions and again with that maddening delay, the infinite leisure that wore even the patience of the Chinese, he waited. He had the leader of the musicians come near him, spoke to him, sent him away, and again resumed conversation with his table companions. Even the pudgy Shui-Mu, who was an assiduous and tireless flatterer, grew weary and strained in his attentiveness.

At last he spoke, saying that now would Po-Shu dance for them, dance like peach blossoms in the spring wind. Again he made a pleasing graceful gesture, and the musicians began to play softly.

Little Po-Shu came slowly from between the two guards that had remained at her side. Her black hair was bound with a jewel-studded circlet from which bangles hung. Her fingers were covered with rings and her wrists with bracelets. At every step there was the tinkling of anklets. She came before the table, on the rug, and gave one long staring piteous look toward T'eeay Layeen, though T'eeay Layeen could see that her glance went past him.

Then she turned with head downcast, and sank slowly, like a flower that wilts, and crouched as if lifeless with her forehead against the rug. The music became louder, faster, but still Po-Shu crouched, huddled down on her knees, like one who has died in prayer. All about the Hall men were beginning to stand up, peering, wondering. This long obeisance seemed rather too long for even Tsing-Ku, who liked the full measure of courtesy. He spoke to her. Her body trembled as if his voice had brought back life. Slowly she arose, with head lifted, rising as a cobra lifts itself. Her small hands were pressed against her breast. Without sound or warning she leaped—a hand swung high overhead, and in her hand a knife. Tsing-Ku, with his mouth gaping noiselessly in sudden horror, wriggled frantically to get from his heavy high-armed chair; but before any other man had moved or a shout was lifted, Po-Shu struck. The steel blade snapped on the breast plate under the yellow robes. Her hand, holding the bladeless handle, rose to strike again, then hung motionless as she stared at it.

Tsing-Ku, lurching fearfully, had got out of his chair, squeezing between the chair's arm and the table; then with frightened face turned over his shoulder he saw Po-Shu motionless, looking like one betrayed by the gods as she stared at her up-lifted hand. He faced about and cried shrilly:

"Cut off that woman's head! Cut off her head and throw her body to—"

Warning cries went up from every side of

the hall; there was a confused, jerky, shrieking jargon of sound, and all in a dizzying instant a huge shadow seemed to fall protectingly over Po-Shu. Heddon swept her aside and back as if knocking her away; and the swinging blow he aimed with far reach of arm at Tsing-Ku split the up-thrust head of the fat little Jelly-Fish, Shui-Mu, and caught between his chair and the table he sank as if crawling slowly down to the carpeted floor.

Tsing-Ku dove with a tripping fall and frantic scrambling among his long robes, tumbling about among the feet of his guards; but he was safe, for there was the long table and many men between him and Heddon.

A storm of amazed and angered yells filled the Hall. Pikemen struck at Heddon; he struck at the heads of pikes, and in three blows left only wooden staves in the hands of two men. They thought him a devil, thought many devils had fallen among them, for the other white men too fought to be killed and Tsing-Ku's guards had love of life.

Tumult roared on all sides. Tsing-Ku was screaming, unheard; but men did hear the voice of T'eeay Layeen—it had the quality that gave commands above the roar of a boarded deck.

Heddon, crouching and with powerful heave of shoulder, at the same time watching out for the blows that came at him, had overturned the table; then snatching down, he drew away from its scabbard the jewel-handled sword of the dead Shui-Mu, and with hardly a backward glance he tossed it backward so that it had clattered near the feet of T'eeay Layeen.

Heddon took the downward blow of a pike on the upturned edge of the heavy sword; he made a reaching left-handed grab for the shaft of the pike and jerked it toward him, rose to his toes, and the pikeman who had gripped hard to make his blow deadly was jerked forward before he could release his hold and fell face forward under the splitting edge of the crescent blade. Pikemen struck at Heddon, thrust at him; he fended this way and that, dodged low, swerved aside, and dropped behind Tsing-Ku's massive chair as a pike cut into the hard teak.

Then a howling pikeman, with blade leveled for a thrust, bent low to lunge from one side, and the savage executioner, Li Neng, having wrenched a sword from one of Tsing-Ku's table companions, sprang forward with blade whirling; and still a third Chinaman swung up his pike until the head of it rang against the low roof that its fall might be the harder and split this foreign devil into pieces. Heddon jumped forward; jumped clear over the arms of Tsing-Ku's chair straight at Li Neng who, more of a juggler than a fencer, was making a whirling play that was meant to dazzle.

The downward chopping pike struck the spot Heddon had just left and the shaft of the pike splintered; and near Heddon, as he struck Li Neng's sword down and drove the curved blade forward in a straight thrust that took the life of Li Neng, a roaring voice bellowed, "Give 'em ——!" and Pelew, naked to his loins, already smeared with his own blood, knocked aside a second pikeman's thrust at Heddon, leaped like an ape fanged with steel, struck twice, threw his knife aside and snatched at a fallen sword.

Behind him the child-like Po-Shu, with a fury-look in her black eyes, stooped for the knife and held it to her breast, meaning to die under her own hand when the friends about her were dead.

Old Tom and Young Raeburn hacked to right and left. T'eeay Layeen had come near them. He was thin and gaunt; torture had eaten away flesh under his skin, but his eyes blazed with a terrible menace and when he struck it was with a swift coolness and unerring reach.

Woo Lung was there by them, his wrinkled old face still impassive, his hands empty, like a man who will go submissively wherever fate leads. He put his gentle old hands to Madame as she stood staring blankly, unafraid, not realizing what it was all about, but a little confused. She did not know him, did not know what he said, did not care. At times she seemed dully trying to follow the flash of steel as if its glint interested her.

VII

T'EEAY LAYEN showed the way, Heddon and Pelew led. In his left hand Pelew held the revolver which he had stolen on board the bark and kept secretly; and because the Chinese dodged and gave way hurriedly when pointed toward them he held

the gun menacingly even after it had been emptied.

The Chinese were in a hubbub of confusion; they were without anybody to lead or drive them to an attack. Most of them were without arms. T'eeay Layeen and those with him could have been smothered by rushes, cut down, cut to pieces; but Chinese willing to die first that others might be triumphant were lacking; and there were more who pushed back, making way, keeping beyond reach of the steel than there were who tried to push through and fight.

The shrill yelling of Tsing-Ku, who having been frantic to get safely at a distance, now took care not to get near enough to be hurt, had in it nothing of leadership. He promised wealth and captaincies, but could not be heard. The Chinese yelled clamorously that these men could not escape, wherever they went; but amid all the confused shouting little could be heard but noise, and the great catacomb depth of the hall mocked the tumult with its echoes.

T'eeay Layeen directed the march of his tiny phalanx straight for the wide doorway opening into the small room where stood the sacred shrine of Kwan-Yin, the gentle goddess who protected sailors, patroness of Sea Brothers.

This room was of ancient stone; there was but the one doorway, and this had heavy double doors of lacquered and gilded wood. These doors were never closed, had never been closed, except at the times when T'eeay Layeen, withdrawing to be long hours alone in his prayers to the goddess who had so greatly favored him, shut the ponderous doors and barred them with a beam of black teak.

As they marched through the midst of the Chinese, thick as maggots, Pelew was like a madman filled with joy. He charged from unexpected angles. Heddon had snatched a torch from its socket, and this in his left hand was not unlike a flaming club which he beat into the faces of men.

The Chinese, angered, curious, amazed, the whole of them so sensitive to superstition that many were awe-struck, squirmed backward; and some few, before they were aware of where their backward steps were taking them, were caught in the open doorway of Kwan-Yin's shrine as in the mouth of a trap, and rushed farther back into the darkness as if hopeful of safety in the shadows of the merciful Kwan-Yin, whose gilded image, tall as a tall child, stood enshrined there.

The only light within the room was from the torch that Heddon carried. Its wavering flare made the sprawling shadows dance over the stone walls and ceiling, in and out of corners as if they were live things. The light struck sparkling gleams from the goddess' gilt, at times tossed up out of the shadows the frightened yellow faces of the slinking men, trapped against the walls.

Heddon faced about with the torch held above his head and peered outward through the doorway with Pelew at one side, Tom and young Raeburn at the other. They expected now a rushing attack from the Chinese who swarmed before the doorway, crowding there, step by step pressing, or being pressed, nearer; steel was now beginning to glitter in many hands, for Chinamen had hurried off for arms and were returning. Their voices babbled with shrill inflections; some cried that these men had now imprisoned themselves and could not escape, others that T'eeay Layeen was sacred to the goddess. Tsing-Ku, hoarse from much yelling, yelled still, crying:

"Death to them! Riches for those who slay them! Kill! Kill!"

His very belly shook within him that T'eeay Layeen was free; he knew the temper of these restless, superstitious men, feared what would happen if they grew quiet enough to hear T'eeay Layeen speak to them, dreaded lest T'eeay Layeen might say—

"The hidden treasure for Tsing-Ku's head!"

VIII

ONE heavy door swung shut; instantly, with ponderous jar, the other closed.

Angered cries went up from the surprized Chinese; and as no steel could reach them, there was now a mob-like rush and press against the doors; but the thick teak bar had been lifted into place. Men, jammed and squeezed against the unyielding doors, shrieked in pain, struggling backward helplessly. Bones were broken in the press. Those behind pushed wildly, heedless of whom they crushed, tumultuously trying to force the doors.

Those within the room for a moment stood hushed, listening to the sound of storm that beat upon the doors. The timbers creaked like wrenched bulwarks at sea, wave-beaten; the bar was sprung

inward as if warped. Heddon, with sullen glowering, watched the doors bulge; he expected them to splinter, breaking in upon the room. This then was to be the end, for here they were trapped.

T'eeay Layeen said calmly, but with imperious lack of mercy, pointing to the five or six Chinese at a far wall of the room—

"Kill these men!"

The wretched fellows seemed to understand the words, certainly the gesture. Two had swords in hand; all cried for mercy, and one after a wild look about him threw himself face down before the Goddess of Mercy, wailing his prayer.

"Here, hold this! Quick, take it! Up high—hold it up!" said Heddon, hastily giving over the torch to Woo Lung.

T'eeay Layeen stepped forward and struck the neck of the man prostrate in prayer; and having struck, his sword came up on guard. He spoke in Chinese, pointing to the floor with the stump of an arm. Such was the habit of command that he bade these men kneel and die.

For a moment they gazed wildly. They were like rats in a trap; then like rats, with sudden squealing and cries, they rushed franticly, struck out and plunged about; they had no hope of escape, but tried with agonized flurries to dodge for a mere second or two their own death. It was like a frightful game, cruel as if planned for cruelty.

"Death must make them blind!" said T'eeay Layeen, as if in his mind there was a deeper meaning than mere revenge.

Then a Chinese, sword in hand, leaped away from a thrust at him. His face was turned backward in a look of terror, and in his leap he struck against Woo Lung, knocking him from his feet. The torch fell. Instantly the bare foot Chinese leaped toward the flame and with a flurry of trampling stamped upon the fallen torch, and the flame of the torch was extinguished. Its glowing butt gave off a stream of smoke. It had become black within the room, and the fellow had moved aside furtively.

For as long as a man holds his breath it was silent, as if those within the room had been drowned in darkness; and the startled helplessness of the suddenly blind was upon them. They knew that somewhere, nearby, was an armed uninjured man, whose wild slashings would be unseen, whose very body would be as invisible as the devil's in the night time.

Blows beat upon the doors, the blows of edged steel. Voices outside mingled in an angry mob-sound. The door must give way. When the end is inevitable the delay of a minute or an hour does not matter except that man clings desperately as long as he can to that little piece of driftwood that keeps him afloat, the driftwood he calls Life.

"Thank God—" it was Heddon's voice—"thank God, there'll be light in hell anyhow! Stand by. I'll see what can be done now!"

Heddon went from near the wall and groped over the floor. He coughed from the smoke, and finding the torch, picked at it with his fingers and blew upon the trace of embers. A tiny flame flickered up into his face and died as a blade striking wildly whistled past his head.

On the instant Pelew, with an explosive curse, dropped his sword, useless, even dangerous to friends in the darkness. It fell with a clatter as he jumped empty-handed at the dimly seen form, vaguely silhouetted for a moment by the tiny flame's flickering; he jumped headlong, as a diver plunges. Falling, an outreached hand touched the bare back, a groping arm caught the leg, of the Chinese. As Pelew hit the floor he brought the man down backward on top of him. Their bodies thrashed in the darkness; then there was the sound as of a green gourd being beaten on a rock.

As Heddon blew flame into the unraveled, shredded fiber of the torch, Pelew could be seen with his hands on the dead man's throat, pounding the head on the floor. Then Pelew rose awkwardly, staggered, put his hands to his side, half fell against the wall and sank down slowly.

Heddon stooped to him; said—

"Lie down, lad."

"My breath—I can't get my breath. You—" his bold eyes glared up in the torchlight at Heddon—"you called me coward onct!"

"Not I, Pelew!"

"You thought it anyhow—onct! I ain't! I ain't afraid o' no —— man!"

"True, before God!" said Heddon.

"He struck me here—" Pelew bent his head, peering at his side—"don't hurt none. Feels all hot an' queer inside—sorta takes my breath—"

"The breath'll be out of us all soon, Pelew. They're chopping in that door."

"I'd better get up an'—" Pelew began

trying to rise. He got dizzily to his knees, leaned against the wall. "This blasted light! Ever'thing wobbles, mister. I—why blast my blasted soul, I—I can't get up!"

"Don't try. Lie back, Pelew."

Pelew stared toward the door, tried to rise again, reeled, and would have fallen but for Heddon's hand; then he sat down, back against the wall. A hand twitched convulsively to his side; but deeper pain than where the sword had pierced struck into him. His bold eyes focused intently on Heddon's face:

"Mister! They're comin' in an' I can't fight—an' won't be dead! I've seen what they do, an' they'll do it now to me! Mister, kill me! Don't let 'em—oh don't let 'em! Pick up that steel an' when I ain't lookin' do it! I never begged a man before, no—— man that lives I never begged! But do it, mister! Won't you? When I ain't lookin' —do it, won't you?"

Heddon, still down on one knee, peered from under the uplifted torch. Black forms were huddled sprawled about the floor; and while the doors were being splintered, T'eeay Layeen coolly stabbed at one corpse after another, as if torturing, mutilating the dead. He was making sure that no wounded man might be left with an open eye. From her pedestal, Kwan-Yin, Goddess of Mercy, gazed with impassive benignity upon the dead and upon the living.

Heddon shifted the torch from his right hand to his left and picked up the heavy crescent-bladed sword he had dropped when reaching out to steady Pelew; and he said quietly:

"They will never put you to the torture, Pelew. Before God, I swear it!"

IX

HOLES were hacked into the heavy doors, and slant eyes peered wolfishly through, and saw nothing. The room was dark. The chopping went on. Tsing-Ku urged haste and lifted his own voice, now hoarse, urging men to shout clamorously, to scream and howl—this, cunningly, so T'eeay Layeen could not be heard if he tried to speak.

Armed men were ranged on either side of the doorway, like boarders ready for the attack. There was to be no mercy and no parley.

"There is no treasure!" Tsing-Ku told the Chinese. "T'eeay Layeen carried it off and it was lost at sea! That is why he could not tell where it lies hid! Instant death to him! Behold, the Goddess has drawn these devils into her very shrine that she may see them, unworthy of her mercy, die!"

Arms reached through the holes cut into the doors, and with fumbling struggle at last pushed up the bar and let it fall. Still the doors would not open. They had been sprung, and sagged; the bottom edges caught against the uneven stones of the floor. With much heaving and the pressure of many bodies they were forced open. The room was in darkness, and from within there was no sound.

Torches blazed up in the doorway from uplifted hands and the light danced on the farthermost walls, into every corner; but only the dead were there. T'eeay Layeen was gone and all the white devils—gone through walls of solid rock. Men crowded in staring, suddenly silent, awe-struck, and thrust out arms pointing in mute horror at nothing, at the empty air, at where Kwan-Yin had stood. The Goddess had vanished from her shrine. This was the worst of omens known to them. Soothsayers had proclaimed it often.

Voices broke the awed stillness with, "Kwan-Yin is angered! Woe! Woe!" "Misfortune comes!" "T'eeay Layeen was favored of the Goddess—she has abandoned us!"

They howled, knowing that they and their island would now be given over to devils. The omen was terrible. The old prophecy of T'eeay Layeen's soothsayers was remembered: "When the Goddess is angered she will vanish, and when she has vanished doom will follow." They were terrified. They knew themselves and the island doomed.

Tsing-Ku the cunning cried out hoarsely. Men would not hear him. He struggled through their numbers, and the better to be seen and heard, mounted the pedestal. He shouted, trying to make himself understood:

"—the image was wood and could not move without being carried! Level one stone from another until the secret passage is uncovered, and then you will find the hidden—"

No man would hear more, and few had heard so much as he had said. Voices

yelped at him. Angry yells went up that he so scorned the power of the Goddess upon whom they depended for fortune at sea. Men began to cry out that by this sign they knew she protected T'eeay Layeen from his enemy, Tsing-Ku. The Goddess must be appeased! Tsing-Ku had brought misfortune upon them. Tsing-Ku had tortured the One-Favored-of-Heaven! Tsing-Ku, miserable wretch, now dared impiously to stand on the very spot sacred to the lily-feet of the Goddess—death to Tsing-Ku!

The ferocious mob-sound, full of storm, arose deafeningly. Hands snatched at the robes of royal yellow, tearing them to rags; and they pulled the rags from his dead body; they unlaced the steel plates that protected his coward's heart and back, and furiously, to appease the Goddess of Mercy, they hacked him into the Death of Ten Thousand Pieces.

So perished Tsing-Ku, the most cunning of all cunning men.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SECRET PASSAGE

ON LEAVING the room that held the shrine of Kwan-Yin, those whom T'eeay Layeen led entered a narrow, moist, dark passageway, bearing with them the gilt image of the Goddess; and between them Heddon and Old Tom carried Pelew. T'eeay Layeen had often entered this secret passage when supposed to be upon his knees, praying for victory; now, just as soon as the rock, so perfectly balanced and fitted as to seem the work of magicians rather than of stone masons, swung back into place, he pointed to a jar on the floor. Po-Shu picked this up. It contained candles and sulphur matches in an air-tight box, but the dimly flaming butt of the torch which Raeburn carried served them for light.

Climbing, they reached the floor of a natural cave; here the air was fresher, as if there were an opening to the sea. The torch, nearly burned out, gave off much smoke and was extinguished after Po-Shu lighted a candle. Being told to put it down and light others, she looked about a little hesitatingly, not knowing just where in this unfamiliar place to put it; then she stuck the candle on the nearest convenient object, which was a small iron-bound chest that stood on another larger, darker chest.

Then one candle, another and still others were lighted; and Po-Shu moved here and there and placed each candle where she could.

As if these candles cast a magic light, those watching saw chests, boxes, great vases, oddly shaped bundles, small strange images with gleaming eyes, take form out of the cave's darkness; they saw shining things, scattered as if in pillage, like gold and silver and jewels, some in sprawling heaps on the floor; and they saw here and there skulls, grinning in lipless mockery, bones, and the fleshless ribs that had once formed the cages that imprison the hearts of men.

Old Tom, dry-mouthed, gaped, turning from side to side; he said, muttering—

"Men been here before, like us, looked on these things—an' died."

II

THIS was the treasure store of the pirate Hwang, who twice had plundered the treasure fleet of the Great Mogul and once, so legend told, had made an Emperor of China ransom his own daughter. Every chest, every box, every vase, was filled with wealth; every image was of silver or gold or because of workmanship more precious than silver or gold, and even those of the precious metal were more precious because of the workmanship. An idle hand dipped into any vessel could have brought away jewels enough to make a prince of any man, for this was the choicest loot of rich cities that armies had plundered; and the bones that lay about were the bones of men who, having from time to time been compelled to carry this wealth into the hidden cave, were imprisoned and left to die that they might not betray the secret.

Once in climbing about the cliffs T'eeay Layeen had noticed a crack which in its widest place was hardly as wide as a man's body. He dropped small stones into it, but they did not fall far. However he could feel a draft; and came again to the crack with a long rope and candles. He fastened the rope and crawled down, squeezing through where he could, and with much twisting reached the roof of the cave, then dropped, lighted his candles and discovered that he had at last found the treasure of Hwang. He discovered the passage leading to the rock door.

Its secret was no secret from within the passage, and opened readily. How it had been fastened to imprison men so that they died of hunger, he had not been able to learn, though it was evident enough that any weight, and not necessarily a heavy weight, against the outside of the rock door would prevent its being opened. At that time the passage opened from a dark vaultlike room which T'eeay Layeen readily converted into a shrine for Kwan-Yin, arranging it so that he might retire for long hours into the treasure cave without being suspected of another thing than piety. And he had made soothsayers among his crews declare that the most terrible of all omens of disaster was the disappearance of Kwan-Yin from her shrine. Twice when the crews had grown rebellious, the Goddess had vanished and did not return until they became abjectly humble.

Said T'eeay Layeen with a slow gesture that indicated even the remote and unlighted depth of the cave:

"When misfortune lifts its terrible wrath from us, each of you may choose freely from all that is here, and own as much as he can carry. And more! That it may never be said on earth or among the watchful dead that T'eeay Layeen ever unworthily rewarded the bravery of men, each of you may take as much as any two can carry."

He looked from one to another, and had an attitude as if waiting for something, some sign, some expression from them. He, knowing how deep avarice lies in men, how violently it rises, perhaps now expected excitement, a scrambling rush and pawing, an overturning of every chest and search to make sure that something more desirable than other things did not escape them.

But there was hardly a stir. Old Tom looked about him, scratched an ear, and worked his jaws as if chewing tobacco. His mouth was dry and thirst and hoarseness made his throat squeaky. He was unimpressed by treasure, but eyed the bones of the long dead. Heddon was down on one knee, holding Pelew in his arms, and Pelew feverishly muttered, asking for water. Woo Lung and little Po-Shu, wistfully unhappy, stood as if they, being Chinese, had no part in the scene. The withered old cook, from whom all merriment had long since gone, folded his arms across his belly as if patiently waiting for something of no importance. Young Raeburn, weary and worn to exhaustion, had turned into the darkest place near by, sat down with back to those about him, hiding himself, and pressed his hands to his face that none might see his eyes ran with tears. He felt himself a coward, and cried the more in exasperation that he cried at all.

Madame had gazed listlessly at the points of candle-flame, dully fascinated by their brightness; then her eyes caught the twinkling glint of shiny things amid the scattered heaps on the floor. She stooped to them, sat down, ran her hands deep among them, playing with these bright glittering things. She talked to them, and laughed like an imbecile child with pebbles. At last, and for the first time in all of her restless life, Madame was happy.

T'eeay Layeen took up a candle, and Woo Lung, being told to do so, lifted the lid of several chests before opening the one T'eeay Layeen remembered contained Indian tapestries, embroidered cloth sewn with pearls, robes shot with gold and silver thread, shimmering with jewels, fabrics made for the wear of princes of the East. Much of this was ruined by age, rotted, but these things were shaken out and laid on the floor, one upon another for softness. At times a row of pearls rippled from a broken thread and scattered, bouncing like tiny hailstones.

"There ain't no good in all this to us," said Old Tom. "I'd give my share f'r a pipe an' plug, I would, an' some cold water. Look at the bones o' them fellers—they scattered this stuff about as if tryin' to eat it, an' died o' hunger. I'm thirsty now!"

Pelew was put down upon the pallet made of princes' robes. T'eeay Layeen took up a cup of jade, and showing the way, led Heddon to a far dark corner of the cave where there was a stagnant pool formed from water that had trickled through the cracks during the rains.

"Well, it's at least water," said Heddon. "And if it kills us, that'll be better than dying for lack of water."

Young Raeburn, having pulled himself somewhat together, sat down on an overturned chest. Its wealth lay half spilled. He absently stirred the heap with his toes and looked with weary indifference at what came to view. This was treasure, but they were without food, and the boy was sick with weariness. About his bare feet were necklaces, rings, bracelets, the jeweled handles of daggers from which the blades

had been broken, ropes of pearls with many of the pearls cracked and marred; there were pins, earrings and jewel-encrusted bands pendants, buckles, every form of trinket, as if the fierce raiders of old time had thrown these things helter-skelter into the chest as they tore them from the bodies of Oriental queens.

Interested by something, Raeburn bent forward, picked it up and peered:

"Tom, would you look here! Can this be gold? It's a chain, with every thread of it thin as a child's hair—"

"No good to us, lad. I'm wonderin' an' is Ol' Bill, mug in hand, a-leanin' on them parypits a-lookin' down? All this here treasure, an' what I want's a pipe an' some hard biscuits with a wet wind blowin' us to —— an' gone from Chiner!"

"But how can they do it—as thin as hair?"

"Shut up, lad! That word—" Old Tom spoke with something like fear and pointed.

Madame had become motionless. The one word, repeated, seemed to strike through the numbness of her brain, and slowly, doubtfully, she put up her hands to her bald head. Then as they staringly watched, she busily went through the motions of combing, brushing, coiling, and patting sensitively a wealth of hair; and when this was done she turned again and fingered her bright pebbles.

"Ay! It's come on her, lad!" said Old Tom softly, with a steady look at Madame. "I seen a woman go like that afore, on a raft onct when 'er baby died. She held on till the mate jus' had to put it over the side. She took on cruel through the night, but the nex' mornin' there she was with 'er arms all this away—" Tom crooked his arms— "with nothin' in them, and a singin' low as she suckled it. Pore woman!"

Then Woo Lung, at a word from T'eeay Layeen, began to put out candles. But one was left burning, and against this the darkness, like an evil thing, hateful of light, struggled with shadowy bounds and noiseless creeping as if to surprize the tiny flame and extinguish it.

III

HEDDON, squatting with his back to the rock wall, his arms locked about his knees, raised his head and peered into the candle-light. How many hours had gone by he had no way of knowing, for he had lost count of the candles that had been lighted, a new one to the old one as it died. And, hunched over at times, too, he had dozed.

Old Tom, always sleepless, was knees down by the candle, turning over and over in his hard tarred hands a small vase about which a five-clawed dragon coiled. He peered, and muttered, and fingered it as if looking for some hidden spring that would reveal its secret. Little images and vases were set up all about him, as if he too had gone crazy and played at Noah's ark, like a child in a nursery.

Heddon's arms dropped away from his knees; he slid out his legs, stretching them, then quickly drew them up again. Little Po-Shu, curled up, wearily asleep, was at his feet—as if expressive of the woman's place. Once he had lifted her and placed her gently to one side, but when she had awakened, the child-woman quietly left the robes he had laid there for her and returned to Heddon's feet and slept as if mutely beseeching him.

Heddon's hands fell at his side and his fingers idly fumbled with little stones, like pebbles. He gathered some into his palm, looked at them in the dim light, shook them gently, watched the gleaming play of broken fire. Then one by one as an idler on the beach tosses pebbles at a shell, he flipped them at the mouth of the vase from which they had come. Some of the gems glanced off, dropped on the floor, rolled away; where they went he did not notice, did not care. His thoughts were deeply elsewhere. They had no food. The bones of other men who had starved in the midst of this treasure lay about him.

Tom twisted about and held up the small dragon vase.

"It's purty. All these are purty. There's magic some'eres. To look at 'em makes me feel half drunk. Me, scrimsawin' shell an' cuttin' it up for inlay—tryin' to do this! Somethin' like this to ease the hurt inside o' me, an' couldn't—never could. Why? You tell me why? Me, a white man—an' Chinks made these!"

Heddon scowled broodingly and said—

"Even you, too."

"Me what?"

Heddon nodded.

"It's getting us all, already. And when half starved we'll be lunatics."

"Then what's to do, Will?"

"Stay here, we starve. Go out, we die

on our feet—and have it over with. What do you say?"

"Them bones are brittle, like a dried sponge. I felt of 'em. They died, tryin' to eat these things. 'Fore that candle's burned, we go. That's my say."

"It's half burned now, Tom."

"Aye."

For a time they looked at it as men might look at an hour-glass dripping sand while the hangman stood by, waiting the last grain's fall.

All but themselves were asleep. Even the iron T'eeay Layeen slept in deep exhaustion, as if dead. Pelew breathed noisily and did not awaken at the times he talked to himself; the words were deep in his throat, vague, unintelligible, low-spoken. Young Raeburn, with face upturned, lay on an arm and snored. At least he slept soundly, and whatever flew through his head was dreaming. Twice Heddon had reached over and shaken him out of nightmares, but the shaking did not awaken him.

Now Heddon eyed him moodily. Left to himself the boy would have rotted on the Lianfo beach, drinking gin and nuzzling black girls. But at that, was this the better end to a life? Heddon asked it bitterly, thinking half furtively of his own wasted life. What made good, what bad? And what the difference? Here was Pelew, a bad one if ever a man was—and if ever a man was, bravely generous with his life. T'eeay Layeen, merciless as steel. Woo Lung, as full of pity as a good woman. Must the one then be thought evil because the other was good? And Po-Shu, truly treasure-hearted, was a toy-girl, trained from childhood to please men. Could one who had never known virtue sin? And was her brave effort to kill Tsing-Ku less noble because it was wholly treacherous?

Thus as a half-burned candle seemed to measure off all that remained to him of life, Heddon with deep brooding tried to judge of life's values.

IV

SUDDENLY the earth trembled, shook with a deep rumbling. Old Tom sprang upright, frightened, looking into the darkness overhead as if to dodge falling rocks.

"Earthquake!"

"Something more for sure," said Heddon, "than the jarring of the surf!"

Again a rumbling that made the earth tremble. It lasted no longer than three or four startled pulse beats and died away.

Heddon had gotton to his feet and looked uncertainly about, overhead, on all sides. The others slept. The thundering jar had not disturbed their postures. They lay like the dead.

"Will, let's get out an' go. Say-Lean, he'll stay an' starve—it's in him to do that, but it ain't in me. An' these here earthquakes—what if rocks fall on us so we jus' lay an' suffer? My mind's made up. I'm goin' now!"

Then Old Tom bent down and began shaking Raeburn. Heddon swore, saying:

"Don't grudge the lad his sleep—let him be! What's the matter with you?"

"Matter? Ain't the lad a friend? An' how'd you feel to wake an' find me an' him had gone off some'eres without a word to you? He's the right to have his chance to choose, ain't he? Want him to stay an' starve?"

Old Tom crouched by the boy, shaking him, saying:

"Turn out, lad! Turn out!"

Raeburn mumbled drowsily.

The old fellow answered:

"Aye, the watch is called—all hands! Breakers ahead—Snug Harbor lays beyond—an' Fiddler's Green is there! Up, lad."

Raeburn sat up, blinking. He rubbed his face with his knuckles, gazed about, said—

"I dreamed we wasn't here an'—"

"Won't be f'r long. We're goin' out."

"Going? Where, Tom? Where's to go?"

"Out there. Stay here, we starve."

"Give ourselves up—to Chinamen?"

"To make it a fight, lad, an' die like men! Ye comin'?"

"But them, Tom? Do we leave them here?"

"Aye. Stayin' won't help 'em. Say-Lean hisself said there weren't no food, but here we c'd at least die in peace. You heard 'im. Ye comin'?"

Raeburn looked down, swallowed at the cold lump that had come suddenly into his throat, but the lump would not down. He put his hand there, pressed hard, and in a hushed voice answered:

"Whatever you do an' Will there says. My mouth's all hot an' sticky. I want a drink."

Heddon reached to the niche in the rock

where he had placed the half-full cup of bitter water that from time to time he held to Pelew's lips; now he held it out to Raeburn.

"It's bitter as hemlock, boy," said Heddon kindly. "But better men than we have taken the hemlock and gone out."

Raeburn swished the cool bitter water about in his mouth, spat it out, handed back the cup:

"That's enough. It's awful cold in here. I feel—it's the cold makes me shiver this away."

"I feel it, too," said Heddon reassuringly. "The chill o' these rocks!"

Again the ground shook and Raeburn cried,

"What's that?"

"Earthquake," said Old Tom. "Not near as strong as them we felt a while ago."

"The rumbling's stopped," said Raeburn, listening intently.

"Come along, Jack."

Tom pulled at him and the boy moved along with him.

Old Tom took up a fresh candle, lighted it and started off. Heddon stopped, then turned back. He took up the jade cup, stooped to Pelew, and with an arm under his head, lifted him slightly. But the dry parted lips did not move though the cup touched them. Heddon peered closer. The lids were half closed, the eyes had the look of death. Then Pelew's lips trembled with a greedy sucking movement under the touch of the bitter water. The lids raised; an expression of life flickered through them, then the eyes closed, sleepily.

"It's little enough, but the least I can do," Heddon reflected. "You've been a queer one, Pelew. I can't make you out. You never cared a —— for other men's lives, and there's been no whine over the loss of your own. Maybe the kind thing now would be to squeeze out the bit that's left you—but I won't and couldn't! Little Po-Shu will give you water as long as she can stand, which'll be longer than you'll have need of it. If you could stand on your feet you'd be one to go with us now!"

Heddon raised Pelew's head and adjusted the folded robe that was used as a pillow; then in smoothing the pallet felt a knot. It was a gold embroidered rosette, set with jewels. Heddon pulled it from the cloth and cast it aside. A lump to a sick man's back was a lump, whether a wadding of straw or of gold thread.

Heddon stood up and looked down into the shadows where the others slept. Tom and Raeburn, many steps off, had stopped and were bent together, examining something. Heddon stooped to Po-Shu, gazed at her, once lightly stroked her hair. She slept too wearily to awaken, and was never to know that his hand had once touched her affectionately.

He walked away, taking the stub of a candle with him, his hand shelteringly before the candle's flame; and darkness came in behind him and settled over them.

"Will, here—see here!" said Old Tom, not excited but as if he had found something very strange.

He and Raeburn were at a long chest. The lid was thrown back. Raeburn, dipping deeply with his hand, lifted his hand as a child plays with sand and a tiny cascade of gold dust fell from his fingers.

"Gold, finer than sand, even!"

"Pure gold," said Old Tom, fingering it, working his fingers about.

Heddon scooped up a handful, squeezed it, let it fall, and wiped his hand against him, shaking off the clinging dust from his fingers, and said:

"The story is that this is part of the ransom paid by an emperor for his daughter—an' I wonder did she have the beauty or half the heart of little Po-Shu?"

"Not much she didn't," said Old Tom, striking his hand against his thigh to knock off the gold dust. "Now come along, ye lads. These here riches is all unlucky. Thy've done nobody good as touched 'em. I want to git out 'fore I stay here fingerin' this stuff an' git witched, too, so I won't want to go!"

"There's that rumbling again!" said Raeburn.

All listened for a moment. The sound died away.

"Sounds like thunder down inside the earth! Come along," said Tom.

As they went they wiped their hands on their blouses and trousers, garments given them when they had been cleaned and dressed to enter the Hall of the Thousand Pillars.

V

AT THE end of the passage they came against the stone wall; Heddon pulled at the handles carved in the rock before them, and with a tipping motion the great stone

moved easily, slowly. He had expected this, yet had something of a sense of surprize, almost as if the rock had stirred under the magic of the words, "Open Sesame."

"You lads out first! Crawl through, quick!" said Heddon.

Old Tom quickly peered through.

"Daylight," he said.

No one was in sight. He scrambled through. Raeburn came after him; then Heddon.

Heddon reached an edge of the tipped rock, pulled down. Slowly, smoothly, it closed. The secret of the passage was again concealed. No man could find it without one stone being torn from another.

The earth seemed to tremble slightly; sound, loud sounds rising from many places, broke into confusing echoes as it came to them through the cavernous Hall of the Thousand Pillars. For a moment the three of them gazed in astonishment, one at another. Then Old Tom ran forward, out of the room that had been the shrine of Kwan-Yin; Raeburn and Heddon followed.

Old Tom turned, caught Raeburn, shook him, yelled:

"Not earthquake—them's cannon! An' rifles—hear? An' voices—English voices! Gunboats have come! Aye, somethin' made me want to leave that cave. Come on, let's git out o' here an' see!"

VI

THERE was a twilight gloom in the Hall always, even at high noon, as now. Battle echoes rang through its dark depth. Rifles rattled in sharp fusilades. English voices were heard shouting orders. Chinese shrieked, fleeing through the village, and already the village was burning, for this was massacre. Quarter was never given yellow pirates. Cannon boomed slowly, with thoughtful aim. Having sunk boat-loads of attacking Chinese in the harbor, and riddled the anchored junks in two broadsides, the gunners now pitched their shells far ahead of the landing party's advance.

A squad of British sailors, on the run, came into view—a group of thick black shadows, seemingly masked, so hidden were their faces by silhouette as they stood against the sunlight. Instantly their rifles came shoulder high, and even as Heddon, Tom, Raeburn, called to them anxiously, some shots were fired.

For a moment or two even after they knew that these were white men the sailors hovered with shoulders to rifle-butts. Their boatswain ordered hoarsely, as if shouting through a gale:

"Throw down them swords!"

The swords fell; the heavy crescent blade of Li Neng went from Heddon's hand with far-flung clatter. He was that glad to be rid of the need of it.

"Orders is to take no pris'ners, Bosun!" said a sailor.

"I know it, an' we ain't took 'em yet. You fellows—" this with ominous depth of voice—"you're white men off the *Jackenta*, out there? Then where's that Say-Lean? An' where's the other fellows, all you —— white men that turned yellow pirates—where're they?"

"Dead!" said Heddon. "But to call us pirates, you're wrong. We've been prisoners and last night fought clear—fought clear through the Chinese crew here in this place —they'd brought us here for torture. Look about you, over there, where the table's smashed and bodies lie still, dead!"

The boatswain and some of the sailors looked across toward where Heddon pointed; but the room was dim, and the sailors were unimpressed.

"You fellows joined these yellow pirates—we've heard o' you! No prisoners! That was orders given landin' parties as we were sent away! Line 'em up. Ten paces! Backs agin the wall!"

"Without a chance to tell—" Heddon began.

The boatswain swung up his cutlass, saying firmly:

"You've told enough—off that *Jackenta!* Orders is orders! Not another word. Line 'em up!"

Such is the nature of British justice that even the petty officers, with half a chance, will pause to make the gesture of execution to evade the semblance of murder. Now muzzles of the guns were poked out at the prisoners to push them over against the wall where they were to be stood up and shot; and it was just as if the sailors meant to shoot them now, point-blank.

"Oh, don't—don't! We know of treasure an'—"

Raeburn said it, and Heddon hit him, knocked him down, glowered, swore, said, "You whelp of Judas, you!" then eyed the boy in silence, and felt as deeply hurt as if

he had been wounded by a woman that he loved. This was the deeper wound, for he had regarded Raeburn much as a younger brother who was brave.

Raeburn got up trembling. His voice shook. He stared imploringly:

"Will, I—I—I never thought! I'm—I'm just a rotten coward! But I wouldn't—I won't—they can kill me first!"

"What's that you say?" demanded the boatswain, his ears stung by the word "treasure." There were widely known wild stories of great hidden treasure on this island of the Hidden Port that had so long escaped the search of ships. "You know where treasure is! Come, young un, speak up! Or up agin the wall you go! Come now, you fellows talk—orders is no prisoners, but you show us—it'll mean prize money for the whole ship's company. Maybe," the boastswain suggested temptingly, "you'll get off. So speak up!"

Heddon said nothing and made no sign; Old Tom growled, "Tell ye nothin'!" and Raeburn shook his head.

The boatswain glared at them. The sailors' feet and rifles shifted impatiently, even anxiously, for there was work to do in hunting down the scattered Chinese like rats. No prisoners, was the order; but these were white men—and suddenly the sailors saw the glittering specks of gold dust that flecked the clothes of these men. They did know of treasure!

"We'll take 'em to the cap'n," said the boatswain. "He may not like it—but they know where treasure is!"

VII

CAPTAIN BRAM-TAYLORD of the *Horatio*, there on the beach with an officer or two by his side and some few of his sailors half leaning on their guns and enviously watching their shipmate skirmishers, turned his back inattentively upon the prisoners and looked out through the small valley where the seamen and marines were beating the scrub, banging away at scattered Chinese as they broke cover. Every half minute or so a shell screamed upward from the *Horatio's* bow-chasers and with long flight, arched down, exploding back in the jungle.

Bram-Taylord, though of the famous Taylords, was no more like the typical British seaman in personal appearance than the whippet is like the bulldog, being a thin, ascetic, silent man. His great-uncle had been that same Admiral Lord Hugh Taylord who had served at Trafalgar.

The family traditions were inflexible; and quite like fisher hawks, as soon as one left the nest, though a mere gawky fledgling, he went straight to water.

A slightly humorous and unfriendly person who knew nothing more derisive to say of a man whose ideas of personal and naval honor were so unbending, once remarked:

"Bram-Taylord always talks as if the Queen herself were overhearing every word he said!" And this was just about true.

Captain Bram-Taylord now lifted his glass and looked far away, one place, then another. In two hours his men had done all that could be done without a week of standing about like terriers at rat holes to catch a stray Chinaman now and then. His force was not large, and the island, though small, was thick with jungle, honeycombed with hiding places. It would take an army a month to uncover every hole and exterminate a crew that was already marooned. The island would never again be a pirate stronghold, for now that its position was known it could be watched.

Captain Bram-Taylord, learning that there had been survivors from T'eeay Layeen's junk brought to Sydney, had arranged, though it was done with that slow delay that usually attends business between naval and far-distant civil authorities, to get hold of them. They were questioned; they knew nothing of navigation, but being taken to familiar coast landmarks they had, with these for a point of departure, indicated the general direction in which lay the Island of the Hidden Port. Bram-Taylord then began quartering that part of the ocean, meaning to have a look at every square mile of water until he found this pirate stronghold. A few days before he had passed almost in sight of the island; certainly so near that his ship's smoke must have been seen at the horizon by watchers on the cliffs. Then, literally scouring the ocean, he had doubled back. Late on the previous evening he raised the island, dead ahead. He stood off through the night, steamed around it in the morning, then ventured in.

The last time the *Horatio* had taken on coal at Hongkong Captain Bram-Taylord learned of the seizure of the bark *Jacienta* by T'eeay Layeen and a party of white men.

And here were these men. The only reason they had not been shot by the sailors who found them was because of the word "treasure," and the glinting flecks of gold dust on their clothes.

The senior lieutenant of the *Horatio* was an ex-warrant officer who had come up from before the mast, and was twenty years older than his captain; most of those twenty years had been spent in the China service. Lieutenant Hudson regarded yellow pirates as a pest, something like cockroaches, somewhat more venomous, but hardly more human. And the bluff, honest Hudson understood the traditions and mental processes of this aloof, inflexible captain—who talked as if the Queen were listening—just about as well as he understood Greek.

Now he came up to the captain and said earnestly:

"These blighters know where treasure is! They're keeping mum out of the hope to somehow get off and some day get it. Why not put them up before a firing squad and make 'em talk before we shoot 'em? I warrant you they'll rattle their tongues fast enough in the hope of getting off! And treasure, sir, would make a pretty penny in prize money for all hands!"

Captain Bram-Taylord lowered his glass and silently regarded the lieutenant with a cool severity that made the honest old fellow uncomfortable; then:

"Mr. Hudson, if these men who are about to be executed wish to reveal anything, well and good. But see to it, sir, that they are not induced to talk through any hint or suggestion that their lives will be spared!"

"But treasure, sir! There are old stories about what's hid on this island, and it's important, sir, that we—"

"It is more important than all the treasure under heaven," said Captain Bram-Taylord inflexibly, in a way that would no doubt greatly have pleased her Majesty, "that British justice shall punish according to the guilt; not, sir, according to what the guilty may offer in return for light punishment. We are not corsairs, adventurers nor treasure-hunters!"

Lieutenant Hudson stared in a kind of befuddled astonishment.

The captain again lifted his glass and looked carefully from place to place, then he said:

"Mr. Hudson, have the recall sounded. Nothing is to be gained by pushing into that scrub. And you, Mr. Harris—" to a young midshipman—"signal the ship to place a few shells behind that knoll."

The officers each went off about his duty.

Presently the captain turned and looked at the prisoners.

"You men," he said, "joined with Chinese pirates. There is hardly anything more infamous that white men could do. Nothing remains but to treat you as pirates, so—"

He half raised his hand, turning to call the master-at-arms in charge of the sailors standing by.

"This boy," said Heddon, taking hold of Raeburn's shoulder, pushing him slightly forward as if to have him better seen, "is no more pirate than any honest man might be. Tom here, the same. For what I've done, do what you like. But if you want the truth, I'll give it you, then you can see how little these lads here have done what's wrong!

"The man Walscher—" Heddon pointed out to where the *Jacienta* lay stranded on the beach—"owed me money for work well done, and would not pay. I hit him. He libeled my schooner. To get money for the sum against her I made a fool's bargain with a troupe of freaks to carry off a Chinese girl—they said they owned her. But the night I tried it, Chinamen stole her first from the house of the magistrate and went to sea. I went out too, that night. Two hours later we lay dismasted. In the dawn we saw Chinamen adrift—their lugger had gone down. They laid aboard our wreck. Then out came that same Walscher on that *Jack-Girl* there. I knew it would be for me a lifetime, or thereabout, in prison if taken back on shore. The Chinamen, the same. On board the bark we jumped into a fight and seized her. Not a man was killed, but that was piracy. So be it!

"The Chinaman, T'eeay Layeen—I heard his name then, and not before. The why and wherefore I didn't truss him up and go to port to risk forgiveness from an outraged magistrate would be too long a story, and this is truth I'm telling you, so I won't say a thing you can't believe.

"And believe it, sir, these lads here, Old Tom, Young Raeburn, were simply caught in the ebb tide of my bad luck. It carried us all here, that luck, to this island. We drove the *Jack-Girl* in, and Chinamen swarmed on board. An enemy of T'eeay

Layeen's was in command. He threw us, the three of us, other men and a white woman too, into a black hole and left us there to starve. T'eeay Layeen he put to torture; and last night hauled out such of us as hadn't died to see him chop and burn T'eeay Layeen—and not kill him!

"Being out, we made a grab for swords—go there yourself into that room, or send some men to see, and you will know by the dead still there, and wreckage strewn about that we, five men, cut our way through this swarm of Chinamen you've had a ship, guns and a crew to fight! T'eeay Layeen led us into a passageway he knew the secret of—so we escaped. There was no food, and there were bones of men who had starved. But we knew the secret way to come out, so while the others slept we three said, 'Better go and be killed than stay and starve!' Here we are.

"T'eeay Layeen lies there, a sick and wounded man; and there he stays for all that any word of mine will let you get him out. That's the story, and every word is true. So be done with me any way you like. But these lads here—they're not pirates but unlucky men!"

Captain Bram-Taylord looked for a long time in silence at Heddon, and reflected that though the story was a bit dramatic, too epic in its tone, and had probably been given some false color to make things appear rather heroic—Bram-Taylord did not like heroics—yet there was perhaps a degree of truth in what the fellow said. Enough had been admitted to warrant piracy as the charge; yet it was not quite the same sort of piracy for which such scoundrelly white men as did occasionally join with Chinese pirates were lined up and shot as soon as captured.

After a question or two, Captain Bram-Taylord then, with considerable repugnance, for he did not like this sort of bartering, said:

"As this T'eeay Layeen is a pirate, and an enemy to all civilized nations, in the name of her Majesty, I can offer to withhold your execution, and submit your case to the Admiralty Court, and testify that you assisted us in apprehending this pirate—that is, if you do assist. He is wounded, you say, and without food. He is likely to die there in any case. Perhaps is dead already."

Heddon answered—

"No."

"Why not?"

"There comes a time when life's not worth the price you have to pay to keep it. That's how I feel now. Do what you like. I'm through. But these lads here—they were simply on the ship I, and others like myself, drove along."

Old Tom spoke up, quietly:

"That ain't so. Me, I was pirit too. But this lad here—we shanghaied him. He 's young an' —— unlucky."

Then Captain Bram-Taylord asked—

"Now youngster, what do you say?"

Raeburn shook his head, and there was denial in his eyes. He felt himself a coward because of the trembling that ran through his body as if his very bones were cold, and because of that he would have died any kind of death rather than show himself a coward. He said sullenly, "No"; just that, and nothing more than again, "No."

Captain Bram-Taylord was surprized, even a little curious, that these three men were willing to face death rather than betray a wounded Chinaman. However, he suspected that the old sailor and the boy were being loyal, not to any Chinaman, but to this man Heddon, who seemed a very odd sort of fellow. Rather an intelligent looking fellow, with something like honesty about him if one looked closely enough.

Then Captain Bram-Taylord did something very unlike himself; but he was interested, really curious, as to just what quality of mind and heart these men did have. Most extraordinary, it seemed. Perhaps they had not been touched on just the right spot to show the hidden weakness.

"My men say that you spoke of treasure. This is true? You know where something, perhaps of some value, is stored away?"

He waited pointedly and observed the half furtive anxiousness with which the boy glanced toward Heddon. The old sailor moved his feet, then wiped his mouth in nervous awkwardness with the back of his hand. Heddon said nothing and stood without moving.

"I see," said Captain Bram-Taylord, "you do know. Very well then. Is there any condition that you would like to propose? Any condition upon which you would, possibly, agree to disclose its whereabouts?"

"These lads," Heddon answered, "can speak as they want. I take it that I'll be

up against a stone wall in another minute or two, so they needn't be troubled by what I think."

Old Tom shook his head, and Raeburn, firmly, answered—

"No!"

"Dead men," Heddon then said, "have scant need of the stuff we know about. We'd give it up quick enough for our own lives—but T'eeay Layeen lies there, and another man or two to whom we owe more than death will pay. Give them up so we may live? What the —— good is life to a man if, to keep it, he has to do what he'll be ashamed of while he lives?"

Captain Bram-Taylord regarded Heddon with a long, calm, penetrative look; then, with reserve, nodded slightly.

"Now," he said, "I understand. Perfectly."

A moment later he faced about and called—

"Master-at-Arms!"

The master-at-arms came instantly to attention, saluting.

"Master-at-Arms, take these men on board the ship. Put them in irons, and a sentry over them."

Captain Bram-Taylord, a few minutes later, said to his amazed lieutenant, whose honest head was sadly muddled then and afterward by what was meant, and he never did quite understand:

"—a summary execution would have seemed hardly fitting. The circumstances are such that I choose to place the responsibility of inquiry and punishment in the hands of the Admiralty Court at Hongkong—for you were right, Mr. Hudson, they do know of treasure. Great treasure, sir. Rare and of inestimable value. As with everything of value, it may be put to unworthy purposes. And they have made great misuse of it. But if such treasure as they possess could be distributed among a ship's company, it would, sir, be better than any amount of prize money ever disbursed at the capstan's head."

VIII

IT WAS dusk. Seamen and marines stood at quarters. The *Horatio* was going out, and in the silence about the deck only the long drawn shouts of the leadsmen could be heard.

Heddon, down on the gun deck, stood at a port, peering out. Old Tom was sitting with his back to a bulkhead and ironed wrists hooked over a knee. His old face, dark with the weather stain of forty years at sea, was screwed into the tight wrinkles that always came when he was trying to think, as if it were most baffling and almost painful labor to make thoughts untangle themselves. Raeburn lay on the deck, huddled wearily; his eyes were open, though one was swollen nearly shut, and he too looked thoughtful.

A marine, tired and dust-covered, paced back and forth, limping slightly. From time to time he paused to lean against a stanchion and rub a foot as he stood in a kind of one-legged weariness. It had been hard, hot work, chasing about there on shore; but great fun! And the way those Chinamen that came out in boats to board the ship had been blown out of the water! Silly blighters! Old Hudson, who had been fighting Chinks most of his life, knew how to fool them. Masking the guns with a belt of canvas along both sides of the ship had turned the trick. Chasing about there on shore had been lively work too. But now he was tired, hungry, needed to take off a boot and get some gravel out.

And after orders of no prisoners, here were three white men who, more than Chinese, ought to have been shot. Old Hudson didn't fool with prisoners when he went after pirates. But this Captain Bram-Taylord was different; and now because of some idea or other he had got into his head a tired hungry marine, with a blister on his toe, had to stand guard.

Heddon turned from the port. His irons rattled. So here he was after the long, long jump to keep from dancing in leg irons to Old Davy's piping.

Raeburn sat up and as his wrists were ironed, moved both hands in rubbing his cheek. It was darkly bruised and swollen from the blow Heddon struck when the boy had spoken of treasure to the sailors. He looked up at Heddon and tried to grin; it was a brave, not a very convincing grin, but he said:

"Will, don't look at me that way. It don't hurt an' served me right!"

"If you hadn't said it—that was all that saved us, all of us from being shot then and there! Seems to be about the way I do things always. I can do the wrong thing quicker than the Devil himself."

"I wish," said Raeburn a little wistfully, "we'd been lucky enough to cram some handsful of what lay there into our pockets before we came out. All that, we handled it—and brought nothing away! That's what I call bad luck!"

"I been thinkin'," said Old Tom and stopped, as if that were important enough to hold their attention for some time. After a pause: "I don't know where we're goin' or what lies head-on, but this here is so much better'n what we had that I'm sat'sfied to be afloat on even a stump-mast smoke-ship. An' I been thinkin'—" he puckered his red-rimmed eyes in a far-off stare at nothing— "We did steal a ship. That *Jack-Girl*. An' that's pir'cy. Somethin' I never seemed to jus' quite re'lize till now. Bein' in irons helps a feller think. Say-Lean he won't stay there an' starve. Not him. He'll git out sure now an' off that island, somehow. An' I wish 'im luck—which is wrong o' me, cause he's a pirit. A real one. Not like us. We never stole a thing from anybody but that Walscher, an' that served 'im right.

"An' I been thinkin'. Maybe ol' Pelew won't die. Be jus' like 'im not to—he's that stubborn-hearted. An' with that old cook an' that little Chink girl to wait on 'im. I wish 'em luck. You jus' know I wish her luck! An' ain't it queer, that French woman wanted jewels so. An' when she got 'em, so many like was there, she was happy cause she thought 'em pebbles. Life plays queer tricks on ye if y'don't look out. Like me here now. I feel so peac'ble toward ever'body. All soft an' warm inside, like I was gittin' sick or somethin'."

Old Tom leaned back with his gaze on a beam overhead.

"Will," asked Raeburn, trying to put the question carelessly, "what do you think they mean to do with us? Over there they talked of shooting. Now will it be hanging?"

The boy asked it of Heddon, who stared down somberly at him, trying to think of what to say; but Old Tom spoke first, answering him:

"Us? After what we been through an' come out lucky? An' I been thinkin'. Do you think Old Bill up there leanin' on them parypits an' watchin'—you think he'll stan' by an' watch shipmates git hung! Not much he won't—not Bill. An' I believe them things. Aye!"

Then they were silent, for the roar of the breakers, as the ship passed between the cliffs and out to sea, was too loud for talk.

Heddon, with faint rattle and clink of chain-links, moved nearer the port and looked through, staring as long as he could see the high black rocks, blacker than the night, fringed in outline by the lacy froth of breakers.

The wealth of Empire lay there; here three men in chains who had fingered it, had abandoned it for lack of food, then renounced it rather than betray a Chinese who had been a friend. And as the ship drew away, and even the last winking foam-flash was lost, Heddon remained motionless, gazing still into the darkness.

THE END

The next Adventure *will appear January first and will have that date on its cover.*

EXPLORERS OF NOWHERE

By WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON

IT WAS a cold, still evening. I had bestowed myself at a ramshackle Chinese inn within the crumbled walls of a more than half forgotten town a few *lis* off the Kalgan railway.

This railway, which had not been long in operation, had been built by the Chinese themselves to take over the traffic that has been performed since the dawning of civilization by the shaggy Bactrian camels of central Asia. The line stretches from Peking, through the Nankau Pass and across several mountain ridges to Kalgan. There the caravans still take up their burdens for the arduous trek across the Gobi.

The Pass, the mountains, the desert-like plains beyond, are bleak and forbidding. There is a compelling fascination, however, about this country that arises from the mystery that surrounds it and the ferocity of the *hung hutzes* who infest it. There is something delightfully fearful in its aspect. A man of imagination, looking at the rugged mountains, has an almost insatiable craving to learn at least a hint of what is hidden behind their buttresses.

At that time only one train daily struggled up the Pass and foreigners were seldom passengers. Nevertheless, it was a link with civilization; and, not having seen a white man nor spoken plain English for at least a month, I walked the several *lis* to the tracks just to watch that train go by.

It stopped at the little station for water. As I stood there looking at the coach windows, all at once I saw several foreigners staring at me, obviously startled and puzzled at my presence in the center of a bleak country.

I was only just twenty-two, and dreadfully afraid of appearing ridiculous. These strangers staring as if I were a curious animal, and exchanging comments, overcame me with sudden embarrassment. I felt like a yokel, gaping at the through express. But there was no line of retreat, nothing to do to dissemble my homesick curiosity. Had I discovered the travelers before they discovered me I might have gone up to them and introduced myself. But this staring was too much!

An absurd idea entered my head. I waved my hand, smiled and turning abruptly, proceeded to walk straight out across the desolate plain. There was nothing in front of me but a barren waste, edged by rugged dangerous mountains already turning blue with the shadows of a cold gray sunset. I never looked behind me. I walked freely at a good marching pace, without self-consciousness, as if I had a definite objective and must be on my way. I had covered perhaps a *li*, a third of a mile, when the whistle blew and the train commenced to move. Even then I didn't turn my head, but continued on my way, until the train had completely disappeared.

"There," said I to myself, "*that* was something to stare at. Now *think* about it!"

A couple of years later, at Singapore, I suddenly had a desire to go down among the lovely little Dutch Islands that lie like a broken string of flat jade beads along the route to Java. I located a Malay launch that made the trip to Reouw and beyond and at dawn the following morning I was off, with no more luggage than could be stowed in one pocket.

I don't think that launch was more than forty feet long. It was a wood-burner, with its furnace open to what winds might blow. There was a superstructure above the deck, over which a canvas canopy had been drawn. Around this bridge deck ran a narrow board bench. The forward bench was the captain's bridge. There he lay rolling Malay cigarets, occasionally reaching up with his foot to give a turn of the wheel with his toes.

Ordinarily this might have been amusing, but for a good part of that journey the water was shoal, electric-blue and lime-green patches indicating beautifully the reefs of coral that underlay the sun-glinting surface. The tub was top-heavy with wood, superstructure and passengers; and a hatful of wind might have caused trouble.

Fortunately no accident disturbed the tranquility of a gold-shimmering day. There was nothing to do but stare across the endless blue of the water, occasionally jerking upright to blink at strange fish, porpoises or a shark breaking the glassy surface with a

refreshing splash. I had attempted conversation and failed. The crew and passengers consisted of Malays, Javanese, Cantonese and some Hindus. I could resurrect no language that they understood. Cutting the top off a golden-bronze Kew pineapple, I drank the warm nectar as it bubbled up, ate the delicious fruit; then put my *topi* under my head and stretching myself upon the bench, slept in undisturbed peace.

Some time during the day, when the sun had well passed the zenith, I was awakened by the boat's coming to a stop. I stood up groggily, looking for land. Not even a palm frond brushed the edges of the sky. From my elevated position I could see no faintest indication of shore; and the nearest island, I knew, was over our bow, hours away. I thought perhaps the engine had gone *phut.*

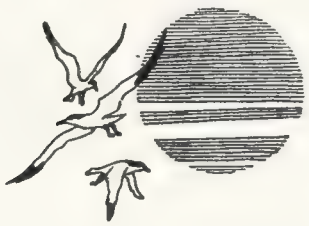
A small skiff was lowered into the water. A coolie jumped in and placed his oars in the tholes. Then a plump, dignified Chinese, with a somber face and a blue silk coat clambered over the railing, and took his place in the stern. He jerked a fan from his sleeve, waved to us gracefully; and the coolie proceeded to row the skiff straight away from the launch.

I watched in silence, wondering what they intended to pick up. I searched the water. I scanned the horizon. I could see nothing. Sky and water blended in pale golden blue. The skiff diminished rapidly in size until it became a blur. Still I could not make out what that plump Chinese was after.

All at once the engine began to clunk, the propeller slopped lazily and the launch moved forward on its course. I turned with a grunt to the skipper. He was reclining on his bench rolling a cigaret, his eyes dreamily half-closed. I hopped over to the ladder and looked down at the crew and passengers below. They were amicably decapitating some chickens for an evening meal, and pleasantly chatting about God knows what. I went to the railing and stared out at the skiff which had faded to a dot and soon completely vanished from my vision.

"Where the —— are they going?" I yelled at the skipper.

He opened his eyes languidly, slowly breathed in a lungful of smoke, breathed it out lazily in a thin bluish haze and fell asleep.



By J. D. Newsom

The man who wrote

"Retreat" and "Mud"

The Unconquerable Jennings

ON THREE sides of the yard there were large yellow-walled barns, with high doors painted a dingy blue; on the fourth side stood the one-story farmhouse which was badly in need of a fresh coat of whitewash. In the center of the yard a mound of manure smoked in the misty light of the winter sun. The rest was mud; rich, gluey, chocolate-brown mud with leaden overtones where the sun glinted on puddles of water.

A dozen hens clucked and pecked about the flanks of the manure pile, while a steely-eyed rooster strutted on the top of the mound.

The door of the farmhouse was open, so that Mme. Loppard, sitting beside the kitchen stove and patching the seat of the hired man's corduroy pants, could keep an eye on the yard. On the other side of the stove Mme. Loppard's daughter Emilienne, was ironing the week's wash, grunting placidly as she drove the hot iron over damp clothes. A pleasant odor of steamy linen, boiled vegetables and manure filled the room.

From the highway came the sound of voices and the steady rumble of moving vehicles, for the village was crowded with troops. But Mme. Loppard sewed and her daughter ironed. The business of life went on smoothly. They were used to the sight and sound of marching regiments after twenty-three months of warfare.

The war was only six kilometers away. It began over the low ridge running parallel with the road. The next hollow was full of concrete gun-pits, which had made a fine mess of Hector Champieux's beet fields. Then came Fontaine-au-Bois where the communication trenches began. Fontaine was said to be in ruins, and the hillside above the village was crisscrossed with trenches, both French and German, which weaved strange patterns among the shell-holes and the belts of barbed wire.

Mme. Loppard's farmyard, however, was quiet and peaceful. The hens pecked on the manure pile, Emilienne's irons rattled on the back of the stove, the vegetable soup simmered gently in an earthenware pot.

Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the yard, two men wearing the yellowish khaki of the French Foreign Legion stood just inside the door of the cowbarn. Through chinks in the wattle-and-daub walls they kept watch on the unsuspecting hens. The

barn was dark and cold drafts wandered about the floor, but the two men stood on either side of the door, motionless as cigar-store Indians.

From time to time the soldier to the right of the door threw stealthy handfuls of grain and chaff out into the mud, but the hens ignored these gifts from Heaven and went their way, passing and repassing within three feet of the threshold.

"Try clucking," whispered the other trooper, a narrow-shouldered man, with a tense expression on his pasty-white face.

"I ain't a hen," retorted his companion, speaking in a hard-boiled way out of the corner of his mouth. "Cluck, yourself."

"But you did it fine that night you was a bit tiddly down at Marsonville! Why, Gor'blimey, even the *patronne* of the café fair laughed 'er 'ead orf, and you know she ain't the laughing kind."

"That don't mean a thing. I couldn't cluck sober on a bet. What d'you think I am, a —— fool?"

"Cawn't you keep your voice dahn a bit? If you ain't more careful the old lady's going to cop us proper."

"Aw, give your mouth a rest," ordered the man with the hard countenance. "You talk too much."

He fished another handful of grain from his pocket and threw it out carefully, so that it lay in a line between the manure pile and the door.

"All you got to do is cluck," persisted the other trooper. "Them 'ens ain't 'ungry enough to want real food, but I never 'eard of one what wouldn't answer a friendly call. My Aunt Florie, what lives in Camberwell, she—"

"For ——'s sake, shut up!" snarled the seed-thrower, crouching down and peering cautiously around the corner, for a hen attracted by the grains was pecking its way toward the barn door.

It was almost within reach when a smartly dressed soldier waded through the mud in the covered passageway leading in from the road. As he struggled past the rusty flanges of a mowing machine both Legionaires caught sight of him. They gave vent to the same oath, at the same time, with the same weary disgust. Scenting a trap, the hen fell backward, squawked indignantly and removed herself from the neighborhood of the barn with much flapping of wings.

This sudden flutter of excitement was

not noticed by the smartly dressed soldier. He picked his way nimbly among the mud-puddles and halted in the kitchen doorway. Bringing his right hand up to the edge of his overseas cap, he called out cheerily—

"*Eh bien*, Madame Loppard, how does it go?"

"It goes not too badly, monsieur," answered the lady. "Will you not enter?"

"Alas, Madame, I have but a little moment to spare."

"But it is nice of you to spend it here," purred Madame. "Enter, I pray you. Emilienne is here!"

"But yes! So I perceive. Mademoiselle—" the soldier saluted again—"I find you very occupied."

"Huh," said Emilienne.

"I have but a minute. We are most busy today." The soldier, who spoke French with a strongly marked American accent, hesitated awkwardly. "The truth is I wondered whether by any hazard you had seen either Monsieur Curialo or Monsieur Withers?"

"That pair of bandits!" exclaimed Mme. Loppard, closing her lips tightly and drawing down the corners of her wrinkled mouth.

Bending over the ironing board, Emilienne sniggered audibly.

"Well, Emilienne?" snapped her mother. "What have you to laugh at?"

"Ha!" said Emilienne.

"Mademoiselle is amused, that is obvious," remarked the affable soldier. "May one ask the reason why?"

"Mama knows," answered Emilienne, resting from her labors while she brushed wisps of damp hair out of her eyes. "Mama is what you call a de-tec-tive."

"Then perhaps Madame can inform me. Everywhere, I have searched for these gentlemen. They are to be found nowhere; yet I have something urgent to ask of them. A soldier of the Legion who is also billeted here told me I might find them with—er—with Madame."

The soldier grinned foolishly.

"No," answered Madame, her voice rising angrily. "I can not tell you where they are, but I am watching for them, Monsieur Jennings. Three of my hens have disappeared already since the Foreign Legion has been in the village. That is monstrous, is it not? I have grave doubts as to the honesty of that Withers and that Curialo. They inspire me with no confidence, monsieur. I have made a complaint only to be laughed at by a monkey of a sergeant, who is a Boche, I am positive!"

Here Emilienne put her hands on her hips and burst into guffaws of rustic laughter.

"Emilienne!" snapped her mother, putting down the hired man's pants, "where are your manners, my infant? That is what I should like to know!"

"But regard the face of Monsieur Jennings! He blushes like a communicant. Perhaps it is he who stole our—"

"Oh, mademoiselle," stammered Jennings. "I assure you I—"

"That goes without saying," broke in the mother. "Monsieur Jennings is a gentleman as one should be, whereas those Legionnaires are crapulous individuals. You should not associate with them, monsieur. They will do you a bad turn. The *bon Dieu* be thanked, they go back to their trenches tonight!"

"I know," agreed Jennings. "I—I want to speak to them before they go back."

"Search the cafés then!"

"Alas, Madame, that has already been done."

"Then they are drunk and prostrated in some ditch. You should avoid such bad company."

"It is their badness which interests me," explained Jennings. "I have important things to ask of them, Madame. Have I your permission to look in the barn where they are billeted?"

"They are not there. If they were in the barn I should not have a tranquil moment. I made sure this noon that the barn was empty."

"Still, may I look," pleaded Jennings, beginning to perspire.

"But of course, monsieur," laughed the lady. "And afterward do come and have a cup of coffee with us."

The two women left their work and stood in the kitchen doorway, watching Jennings steer a crooked course among the puddles toward the barn.

As he reached the threshold he caught sight of a pair of hands beating the air violently. Behind the hands loomed the shadowy face of the Legionnaire who spoke out of the corner of his mouth. The Legionnaire was shaking his head as if he were suffering from an acute case of St. Vitus dance.

A broad smile spread across Jennings'

jolly, round face. He opened his mouth, but before he could speak the Legionnaire whispered hoarsely:

"Beat it! For ——'s sake, beat it!"

From the opposite side of the dark barn came a cockney echo—

"G'arn, yer balmy nut, 'op it!"

Jennings, however, was not to be denied. He laughed an honest wholesome laugh and exclaimed:

"Why, hello there, Curialo. I thought I'd find you here. I've been looking all over Verneuil for you. How goes it?

"And here's friend Withers," he went on, turning to the cockney. "Damon and Pythias, eh? Always together, you two! Come on out, fellows! Let's have a cup of coffee or something. I want to talk to you in the worst way."

"For two cents I'd murder you," grumbled the man called Curialo. "What d'you want to know now: Where the Legion got its cap-badge, or the true story of the Tonkin campaign?"

"Yus, 'e comes barging in 'ere like a blinking general," added Withers. "'E ain't guv us a minute's peace since we been in rest billets! Rest billets. Gor' blimey, it's been worse'n the trenches, what wiv 'im 'anging abaht all the time."

Jennings chuckled happily. He positively seemed to enjoy the abuse, and he rubbed his hands together with quick, brisk movements as he backed out of the barn. The Legionnaires followed him, and as they emerged from the shadows the wrath of Mme. Loppard fell upon them. Her denunciations reached such a pitch of unbridled fury that all the hens went to cover beneath the mowing machine in the passageway, and Jennings bowed his head in shame as if the invectives were being hurled at him.

"Vagabonds!" cried Mme. Loppard, her face twitching with passion. "Dirty thieves that you are! You are worse than the Boche themselves."

"What's the matter?" protested Curialo. "Why, you have hens on the brain. We have been attempting to sleep, for it is tonight that we go back to the war."

"Attempting to steal my chickens, you mean species of Boche!"

"Don't you call us names," indignantly ordered Withers. "Don't you call us species of Boche. If we were Boche it is not hens we should be stealing as you falsely declared! But no! It would be—"

He paused dramatically and pointed a grimy finger at Emilienne.

Emilienne giggled, clapped one hand over her mouth and stared pop-eyed at the Legionnaires.

"Bah!" cried Madame Loppard. "Do you think my daughter would look at such vermin as you? Thank the *bon Dieu* you are going away tonight!"

She slammed the door in their faces and reappeared at the window, shaking her fist at them.

"Well, boys," laughed Jennings. "Up to your usual tricks, I see!"

"If it 'ad'nt been for you," lamented Withers, with tears in his voice, "we'd 'ave 'ad a couple of juicy 'ens to eat when we got to the trenches. Gor'blimey! Ain't you never going to learn—"

"Look here, I'll buy you a couple of chickens," suggested Jennings. "I know how you boys are fixed for money, and I want you to let me—"

"Don't be so free with your —— money," urged Curialo, his mouth all twisted sidewise. "Gosh, you sound like a cash register! When I need money I'll slug you one over the coco, see?"

"Well then, let's not talk about it any more," exclaimed Jennings. "I want you boys to come and sit down with me for a while, and—"

"And tell you all abaht the Legion," sneered Withers. "So 'elp me Gawd, I ain't never seen such a persistent blighter in all my days."

"You're cramping our style, see?" added Curialo. "You run off and play with your ambulance, and quit treading on our heels. If you stick around much longer maybe you'll get hurt. Who butted in the night we was having the argument with the Moroccans? You did! Who woke us up after we'd been out road-mending? You did! I tell you straight, I—"

"That's the real stuff!" chortled Jennings, slapping Curialo on the back. "By golly, that sounds great! Now boys, you must come along with me and we'll have a grand time. We're the only three English-speaking fellows in the village and we must hang together. That was a peach of a stunt, trying to pinch Madame's chickens, but of course it was only a joke. You wouldn't steal an old lady's hens. Her

husband and her son are both away fighting, you know. I'll see you have the best pair of chickens in the village to take up with you tonight. Leave it to me. In the meantime I want to hear more about this splendid outfit of yours—and I've got a slick plan. It occurred to me a while back when I went up to the calvary for a load of *blessés*."

"O Gawd, 'ow 'e does talk!" cried Withers. "What's on your mind now?"

"I was thinking how nice it would be if I could get a *permission* and go up to the trenches with you. You could show me around—"

"If you do that," exclaimed Curialo, "I'll desert. The trenches are going to seem like home sweet home after spending a week in Verneuil with you."

"What I like about you boys," chuckled Jennings, "is that you're such tough customers. Real tough babies—yet you take everything in such good part. I'm sure any one else would have resented all my questions and told me to go away. I know you kid me a lot, but I don't mind that a bit! I'm going to see my section commander this evening and if he agrees I'll—"

"If you come up to our sector," Curialo said soberly, "I'll kill you."

The threat was so brutal that it was meaningless. Jennings laughed wholeheartedly.

"Come on, boys," he cried. "I'll buy you a drink at the Foyer."

Withers looked at Curialo, and Curialo looked at Withers.

"Yus," agreed Withers. "Come on."

Watching through the curtains on the kitchen window, Mme. Loppard saw them splash across the yard and turn into the passage.

Then, suddenly, she gasped, for a slime-coated figure emerged from under the rusty mower and crawled along on hands and knees as if too dazed to arise.

"*Mon Dieu!*" screamed the lady. "They have assassinated the poor Monsieur Jennings."

Outside in the roadway Withers and Curialo hitched up their belts and adjusted their steel helmets at the proper angle.

"Now," remarked Withers, bracing his narrow shoulders, "maybe the blighter 'll lay off us for a while. 'E ain't fit for a decent company, 'e ain't, wiv 'is loud mouth and 'is clubby ways."

"I ain't so sure," grumbled Curialo, sucking his bruised knuckles. "He don't yet know what hit him. I guess I worked too fast—maybe he'll think it was a mistake. Anyhow, let's go have a shot of *pinard* before he wakes up."

They went swaggering down the road toward the Café de la Poste, where instead of coffee they drank white wine.

TOWARD the close of the day a misty drizzle came up the valley and swept across the village. It was a wet, cold drizzle which made the men of the Fourth Battalion of the French Foreign Legion curse magnificiently in a dozen different languages.

After the evening soup they splashed through the mud to their billets to prepare for the return journey to the trenches. By candle-light they sat in leaky haylofts and barns and pig-stys, still mournfully blaspheming, while they listened to the rain and waited for the order to assemble.

In one corner of Madame Loppard's cowbarn two Belgians and a Spaniard were playing cards on a knapsack; near by a homesick Calabrian practiced "O Sole Mio" on a mouth-organ while water dripped drop by drop on to the brim of his steel helmet. A group of four more or less inebriated Legionnaires were explaining to a fifth, who spoke no French, that he was entitled to back pay for some obscure reason no one quite understood. A weak-mouthed Dane, who had left a steady job in a Copenhagen export office to take part in the great adventure was snuffling back tears as he tried to write a letter to his mother. A corporal with a pockmarked face sat beside him, smoking *grenade* cigarets and making wise cracks about home and mother. Other men, case-hardened to discomfort, sprawled in the soggy hay and snored out of black, bearded mouths.

The barn smelled of cows, damp clothing and rifle oil. The high ceiling was full of darkness, cobwebs and shallots. On the floor candles made splotches of yellow light which threw uncouth shadows against the walls.

The corporal fished a watch out of his pocket and called out:

"Another twenty minutes to go, *les poteaux*. Better get ready."

He heaved himself to his feet and stumped about the barn, checking off his men.

"Where's Withers?" he grunted, adding

a second later, "And that long-shanked Curialo? Anybody seen 'em?"

Nobody had seen them. The corporal began to inveigh bitterly against all old soldiers who thought they could make their own laws.

"They think they own the army, these veterans," he complained. "I will pass my hand across the corner of their jaws if they are not careful. It is I who must suffer if they are late."

"They will be here on time all right," retorted another old-timer, who, with many grunts and groans was struggling into his harness. "They were soldiering when you were in swaddling clothes. This new army doesn't know what soldiering means. Now, when I was in Africa back in '13, in the same company as Curialo, we—"

"You'll shut up," barked the corporal. "We're not in Africa now. Just shut up."

Old soldiers rattled him. He was only a duration of the war Legionnaire, who in peace time had been more at home with crude-oil engines than with rifles. He didn't even know the Arab slang which is part of the true Legionnaire's equipment. Consequently he disliked old soldiers and tried to bully them.

"If they don't turn up in one minute—" he began.

Then the barn door opened and a man in a glistening wet slicker stepped in. It was Jennings, with a cheerful smile on his face. There was a small, dark lump on the right-hand side of his jaw.

"Good evening, my brave *poilus!*" he called out cheerily. "Off to the trenches again, I hear! Off to the war!"

"You seem to think it is a picnic," retorted the corporal, looking at his watch again. "Yes, we're moving out in fifteen minutes, and I hope I do not come back in your meat wagon."

"Don't let's be downhearted," urged Jennings. "*Mon vieux*, it is even possible that you may see *me* up in your trenches."

"What for, *nom d'une pipe?*" inquired a trooper, his face blank with astonishment.

"To see what goes on up yonder. To live with you for a while in the front line. Why, sometimes I wish I had joined the Legion!"

Roars of hearty laughter greeted his words. Even the homesick Dane smiled a weak, wan smile.

"Can't you see what goes on by the loads you bring down in your ambulance?" cried the corporal. "And as to joining the Legion—how would you like to be paid five centimes a day? Other troops receive the war bonus of four sous; we don't. Be not foolish, my friend: Stay where you are. You have a good post, dangerous enough at times—"

"But I'm going up some day soon," insisted Jennings. "I want to be able to say I've at least seen some German trenches. And I'll bring up a few bottles of good wine. We'll celebrate!"

His audience became more sympathetic at once.

"Better bring cognac," suggested a Czech. "It goes so much farther."

"Fifteen minutes to go," the corporal called out. "Sacred thousand thunders, where are those —— Curialo and Withers?"

"Aren't they here!" exclaimed Jennings. "Why, I wanted to see them particularly. Curialo's my countryman, you know, and—"

"Yes, yes! All right!" The corporal stamped his feet in the wet hay. "Get your packs on. *Allez, pas de rouspettance!* Time to get ready. If I hear another word out of you, Carnowitz, I'll—" He broke off, shaking his fists at the dark ceiling. "*Nom de Dieu*, I'll have that pair of scoundrels court-martialed. I'll—"

"Now listen here," put in Jennings. "Curialo's a friend of mine. We come from the same country. I'd hate to see him punished. I think I know where he is to be found."

"Where?" yelled the corporal, who still had a full ten minutes to spare but who was afraid of losing his stripes. "Where? But speak then, thou species of a calf's head!"

"Shall I call them? I think they are in the stable. I saw a light—"

"Come!" shouted the corporal. "*Malheur!* Think of having to waste my time on such pigs. Come quickly!"

They went out into the sloppy night, fought their way around the manure pile to the stable. They burst open the door. The rays of a storm lantern streaked the rumps of two plowhorses with glinting highlights. On a wooden bench by the wall sat Curialo, Withers and Emilienne, drinking Mme. Loppard's coffee and Mme. Loppard's cognac out of Mme. Loppard's best blue breakfast cups. Curialo's arm was around Emilienne's waist. Withers sat a little apart, a beatific expression on

his pinched white face, while in his arms he nursed the cognac bottle.

Withers jumped off the bench as if he had suddenly discovered that he had been sitting on a tack. The bottle fell and broke. An odor of cognac filled the stable.

"You had orders not to leave your billet after the *soupe* without my permission," brayed the corporal. "You'll do three days' extra duty—"

Emilienne was screaming. Two of the blue breakfast cups joined the bottle on the floor. Curialo sat firmly on the bench, resting his fists on his knees.

He was about to speak when Mme. Loppard swept in like an avenging angel in a white apron and sabots. Her clamors drowned even the corporal's lusty voice. Nearest to her stood Withers, trying to look unconcerned. She smacked his face with so much force that the plowhorses became restive. The sound of their scraping hoofs mingled with the sound of Madame's clacking wooden shoes. She made a lunge at Curialo and skinned his nose with her nails before he could sway out of reach.

"Out of here, all of you!" she cried, grabbing up the one unbroken cup and the enamel coffee-pot. "Get out! Emilienne, little hussy, what do you mean by this, while your father and brother are dying for the *patrie?* Get out here all of you! My good cognac! I'll tell the captain about this, Monsieur the Corporal, and as for you, Monsieur Jennings— Oh, these men, they make me suffocate. Get out!"

Her final scream was a triumph of hysterical virtuosity. One of the horses tried a tentative kick in the general direction of the intruders.

"Madame, let me assure you of my entire innocence," began Jennings. "I swear—"

"Will you get out of my stable or shall I call the *gendarmes?*" clamored the lady.

She swept them out of the stable and slammed the door shut. The bolts screeched. Rain sizzled as it struck the mud puddles in the yard. It was cold, dark and blowy.

Emilienne, bowing her head to the downpour, began to sob.

"Bah! Tears!" stormed Mme. Loppard. "Throw your apron over your head before you catch bronchitis."

They trudged on. The kitchen door banged. Silence.

"Well," breathed the corporal, slowly recovering his wits. "That's over. *Mes poteaux,* you are punished enough. Let us make haste and pack up and go quickly back to the war. That woman—*ooh la la!*"

"Gor'blimey," moaned Withers, staggering along through the dark, "my blinking ears is still ringing that 'ard I cawn't seem to 'ear nothink. Fair split my 'ead open, she did. And me what was just playing gooseberry. 'Struth—" he felt his burning ears— "I wonder if they're going to swell up?"

"You ought to look good with a pair of cawliflower ears," jeered Curialo.

A voice came from behind them—Jennings' cheery voice:

"Nothing to worry about, old fellow," he called out. "It takes a mighty hard punch to make an ear swell up."

"By the way," remarked Curialo, stopping short and catching hold of the corporal's arm. "How long before we assemble?"

"Five minutes, I should say."

"Who told you where we were?"

"That friend of yours, the *brancardier.*"

"Listen, Corporal, I'm all ready to move out; just got to slip the pack on my back. Can I have two minutes alone with this 'friend' of mine?"

"I comprehend," chuckled the corporal. "But certainly—two minutes. Amuse yourself well."

On one side of Jennings stood Curialo, on the other stood Withers. He seemed unaware of impending danger.

"You might have waited for me this afternoon," he pointed out. "When you slipped in the passageway you caught me an awful crack on the jaw. I can't believe you did it purposely, but it knocked me out completely. I fell under that piece of machinery and when I crawled out you—"

"Now listen," said Curialo, "let's reach an understanding right here before something worse happens to you."

"Why, sure!" agreed Jennings, "but couldn't we get in out of the rain?"

"'It 'im," urged Withers. "'It 'im 'ard, matey. 'E don't properly understand plain English."

"I'm going to," agreed Curialo, "in just one second. Jennings, you poor fish, don't you know better than to be always butting in? Can't I even say good-by to my gal without having you draped around my neck?"

"Why, my dear fellow, I was only trying to help you," answered Jennings in a hurt voice. "I didn't want you to be late."

"What the —— is it to you?" snarled Curialo.

"Aw, 'it 'im," repeated Withers, his teeth chattering.

"I heard the corporal say he would have you court-martialed," Jennings rushed on. "So, of course, I told him where you were. I heard your voices, you know. I've got a *permission* and I'm going up to visit you on Thursday, and I want—"

Something hard struck him on the bridge of the nose. Suddenly, though the sky was overcast, he saw bright stars. His feet slipped in the greasy mud, and as he fell another blow caught him on the cheek, loosening his teeth. He went down with a splash. Beneath him the earth heaved and Withers cried out in a muffled voice:

"'Elp! 'Elp, matey, 'e's trying to drahn me! 'Elp!"

Curialo began to laugh. He laughed until a leg shot out of the squirming mass and kicked his feet from under him. He sat down heavily and became indistinguishable from the rest of the mound of legs and arms, profanity and muck.

Then a whistle shrilled angrily. The dark mass disintegrated. Mud-caked and foul, Curialo and Withers rolled one way, Jennings rolled the other. The two Legionnaires ran into the billet and flung themselves upon their packs.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried the corporal. "He was too good for the pair of you. He was— Oh, sacred thousand thunders, but look at your uniforms! Look at them! When the sergeant sees you he will have you shot."

The candles were all blown out. Guided by the corporal, the squad tramped out of the barnyard and assembled in the roadway. Neither Madame Loppard nor Emilienne bade Godspeed to the brave *poilus* who were going up to the trenches to die.

After roll-call the Fourth Battalion marched out of the village and was swallowed up by the wet, black night. The squelching sound of tramping boots died away; mule-drawn transport rattled by.

In a black doorway Jennings watched the last of the procession fade out of sight. He sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Poor fellows," he said half aloud. "I'm sure they'll be better off up there where they can't get at the booze. I wonder why they hit me. Surely, I didn't do anything to antagonize them! I suppose all men are like that when they have to go back to the trenches."

He meant well, did Jennings.

THREE days and nights without sleep, mending wire by night in a sleet of machine-gun bullets, mucking out trenches by day beneath a slow bombardment of trench-mortar bombs. In between times the spectacular black vomit of shell fire and the inconspicuous whip of the sniper's bullet.

And casualties always: A slow, steady dribble of dead and wounded men being carted down the communication trenches toward Fontaine-au-Bois. Blanketed corpses with muddy boots sticking out over the end of the stretcher, jigging along in a ghostly imitation of Chaplin's spread-eagle walk. Silent men absorbed by the contemplation of their pain, with dirty white faces staring up at the sky out of dull, glazing eyes. Groaning men who writhe like broken worms and stain the canvas stretcher with spurts of bright blood.

An odor of chloride of lime and wet mold and the stink of last week's dead out of no man's land. A whiff of stale gas clinging in old shell holes; shell holes awash with green scum like burst sores on the earth's corrupted face.

Silence. The furtive sound of shovels at work on a new listening post by the Redoute du Crapeau; the scrape of soup cans being toted up on men's backs through thigh-deep mud; rats squealing at night in the litter of tin cans and rotting things thrown out over the parapet; wind tugging at the rusty wire; the drip of water trickling down dugout steps.

Save for a group of mine craters linked up by water-logged trenches, the Germans held the top of the ridge above Fontaine-au-Bois. They had tried a dozen times to clear the French off the crest, and each time, after a bitter fight, they had been driven off.

Among the craters it was hard to know where one line ended and the other began. Old trenches, shell holes and strips of old wire crisscrossed and gashed the tormented land. Bleached bones and tattered uniforms and rusty equipment were churned into the wet clay. Each hole was a graveyard.

Sniped, shelled, raided, the French dug their toes in and held on to the mine craters, for they had a concrete artillery observation post in Crater No. 3, which overlooked the German back-areas. If they lost the post they were without eyes. To the corps commander the crater was worth a thousand lives, twice over. To the men who had to hold it it was not worth two cents.

Withers and Curialo went through their three days' grind in the advanced sector, and staggered back to the support trenches halfway down the hill when their company was relieved. Neither hunger nor cold nor numbing dampness could keep them awake. They crept into their platoon's dugout and fell asleep.

But they were not allowed to rest for many hours. A runner from company P. C. kicked them to their feet and ordered them to follow him.

At headquarters they were confronted by the company commander flanked by Jennings with a parcel under his arm and a smile on his face. The captain and Jennings appeared to have reached a friendly footing. They were smoking the same brand of cigar and had been drinking French vermouth out of cut-glass tumblers salvaged from the wreckage of Fontaine-au-Bois château.

French vermouth, on an empty stomach, works with surprizing speed. Jennings' smile was fixed and toothy as that of a *première danseuse.* One of his incisors was edged with gold. It glinted in the watery sunlight. His happy, round face was slightly flushed.

The two Legionnaires came up to attention and saluted without enthusiasm. They eyed Jennings with intense suspicion.

"Monsieur Jennings comes to me with an introduction from a friend of mine," said the captain. "He desires to see the front. It is his wish that you accompany him. You will show this American gentleman every courtesy."

A German 5.9 wailed through the air and exploded a hundred yards or so beyond the P. C. Jennings grinned; the Legionnaires stood stolidly at attention.

"Monsieur Jennings understands the dangers of the sector," the captain went on, "but he is resolved to expose himself. You will show him all that is of interest so that our American allies may form an idea of the difficulties which confront us. However, do not take him past the Boyau des Crevés. It is not necessary that he should—"

Another long-drawn shriek heralded the coming of yet another shell, which burst a little closer to the P. C. Fragments of steel pattered down about the group by the dug-out entrance. A slight frown appeared in Jennings' face; his interest in the conversation began to flag.

"—that he should be taken into the mine-crater salient. It is now nine o'clock; you will report back here at fifteen o'clock. You understand?"

Curialo made an assenting noise in the back of his throat.

"I regret I can not join you," the captain concluded. "I am desolated, my dear Monsieur Jennings, but I have an enormous amount of work to attend to."

"But not at all," exclaimed Jennings, "it is I who am desolated, my dear Captain."

A third shell stamped into the ground two traverses away, showering the men with dirt and mud and stones.

The captain wrung Jennings' hand with great vigor and went down into his dugout before any more shells could come his way. The prospect of death did not alarm him, but he needed sleep.

"Well, boys," laughed Jennings. "I told you I would come! And, by Jove, here I am!"

"You're a stubborn ——, aren't you?" commented Curialo, thoughtfully scratching his chest. "Can't you take a hint?"

"Oh, you mean that night at Verneuil! My dear fellow, I knew darn well you were just kidding. I can put up with a bit of horse-play too."

Putting his words into action he smacked Curialo between the shoulder-blades.

"'Orse-play," exclaimed Withers, "Gor'-blimey, we goes and 'its yer fair and square and knocks yer cold, and yer calls it 'orse-play!"

"I hit him," retorted Curialo.

"Yus—f'ust. But when 'e was a-laying on top of me I caught 'im a kick in the belly. 'Ere you, did you feel that there kick or not? Gor'blimey, I fair broke my blinking foot!"

"I—I felt many kicks," stammered Jennings, "but I was sure you—"

"You what?" snapped Curialo.

"Well, I knew you'd had quite a lot to drink and I thought you were feeling

merry. Of course, I was only trying to help you, and I'm sure I shouldn't have butted in if—"

"Lor'lumme," cried Withers, turning in despair to Curialo, "'e thinks we was playing wiv 'im when we 'ad 'im on that manure pile. Gor'blimey, matey, 'e cawn't be right in the 'ead, 'e cawn't!"

"I guess you're right," agreed Curialo. "Listen, you ——," he went on, "we ain't had two hours' sleep since last Sunday night, and just as we was about to flop you have to come along and spoil the whole show—again!"

"I'm darn sorry," exclaimed Jennings, more hurt than angry. "I really thought you'd be glad to show me 'round. We ought to hang together over here—"

"Aw, go to —— with them Fourth of July orations," snarled Curialo.

"If that's the case," retorted Jennings, his eyes beginning to snap, "I'll ask Captain Mursaline to—"

"You'll awsk 'im nothink," broke in Withers. "You're going to visit this 'ere blinking front wiv us, and visit it proper and thorough."

"I'd rather not if—"

"If nothink! That there captain ain't 'uman, in a manner of speaking, 'e ain't. 'E'd skin us alive to a queen's taste, 'e would. What's it to 'im if poor blokes like us lose a couple of weeks' sleep? What's it to you? But that don't matter. We'll show you the front-line trenches!"

"But if you don't want my company," began Jennings, backing away toward the dugout entrance, "I think it would be better if—"

"It ain't what we want that matters," declared Curialo, dragging him roughly away from the flight of steps, "it's what we got to do. Ever since we went down to Verneuil you've been hanging around, asking fool questions, buying us coffee, playing fairy godmother—you and your —— back-slapping! We got to hang together, have we? Let me tell you—"

"Trying to patronize pore Legionnaires, 'e is," chimed in Withers.

"Shut up, Bert," urged Curialo. "Wait till I'm through. Listen, Jennings, we'll show you the front; we'll rubberneck all over the —— shop, and maybe you'll stop a bullet. When we're through, beat it and don't ask for more. If I bump into you again somewhere and you so much as bat an eyelash at me I'll put a couple of feet of steel underneath your belt."

"That's right," agreed Withers, scowling ominously, "blokes like us don't want no Lady Bountifuls 'anging around on our houtskirts, and don't you go forgetting it."

"Well," gulped Jennings, who was beginning to feel somewhat *de trop*, "I—I suppose you know best, I only meant—"

"Quit talking and come on," ordered Curialo. "Come on and see the —— front!"

FOR the first five minutes or so Jennings trudged along in silence. The communication trench was not especially interesting. It was narrow, deep and fairly dry, for the steep slope of the hill drained off most of the water. Few soldiers were to be seen. Most of the men were asleep in the dugouts in the transverse trenches, and the winding gut stretched away empty and quiet.

From the top of the ridge came the stamp and crunch of trench-mortar bombs, but the bursts were spaced out over long intervals and the walls of the trench muffled the sound.

Gradually Jennings' spirits revived. He was sorry, of course, that these Legionnaires did not like him more, but he felt sure he had done for the best. He was very much interested in the Foreign Legion, which he thought was a fascinating outfit, and he could not understand why they should object to his company. Still he liked to be liked. It gave him a warm glow of happiness to be called "good old Jennings," or "brother," or "dear old Tom."

"Aha!" he exclaimed, breaking the long silence. "I was forgetting something. Let us pause for a minute, my lads. I have something for you."

Curialo turned and stared at the parcel Jennings held under his arm.

"Coffee in a thermos and chicken-salad sandwiches," he decided. "Keep 'em."

"You're wrong this time!" laughed Jennings. "I brought along a bottle of the real stuff. Let's visit your dugout first, shall we, and give the gang a nip?"

"Ain't we good enough for you?" complained Withers. "Gor'blimey all them coves is sound asleep. They wouldn't thank you."

"Let's see what you've got," ordered Curialo, still suspicious.

They found an empty trench-mortar emplacement and sat down on wet sand-bags while Jennings unwrapped his parcel. The Legionnaires thawed out considerably at the sight of the brandy bottle. Their guest had brought along a corkscrew so that they were not obliged to break the neck of the bottle, which is never a satisfactory way of getting rid of the cork.

They had one nip and then another. Jennings joined them for the sake of good fellowship, although the brandy seemed to explode at the back of his nose and made him cough terribly. Then they filled their canteens and threw the bottle over the parapet.

"You ain't such a bad cove," declared Withers. " 'Ave a lawst swig out of this 'ere canteen of mine afore we start orf."

The words of praise wholly restored Jennings' good spirits. To avoid an argument he took another sip and before long began to feel really happy. Afterward he strode along the trench, humming little snatches from "Tannhäuser."

When Curialo announced that they were entering the front-line system they took another drink to celebrate the event. The trenches lost their neat appearance, the walls were scarred and broken; mud spewed out of moldy sand-bags; underfoot the slime thickened and crept up about Jennings' leather puttees.

Walking lost its simplicity. Each step became an endurance contest against the mud. Jennings felt a sick headache coming on, and something strange was happening to his eyes. Normally his vision was perfect, but all at once he was beginning to see double. There were two Curialos floundering along ahead of him. This astonishing spectacle made him laugh heartily despite the headache.

"None of that!" harshly whispered Withers. "This ain't no plice for 'ilarity."

"I fear no foe in shining armor!" sang Jennings.

"Maybe not," both Curialo's mouths said simultaneously, "but if you don't shut up I'll choke you. Can that noise!"

To avoid an argument Jennings canned it. He did not think much of the courage of these Legionnaires. True, he could hear the crash of explosions coming from some place ahead of him, and an occasional bullet buzzed over the trench, but he felt no sense of imminent danger. If this was war, thought Jennings it was not so very frightful.

Soldiers were becoming more plentiful: Mud-caked, gloomy men, who appeared to be very busy doing inconsequential things. They passed one squad filling sand-bags with semiliquid mud, and another party propping up a bulging wall with chicken wire. Sentries, posted on fire steps, yawned as they peered through periscopes or slits in the parapet.

Jennings jumped up beside one such sentry and promptly got knocked down. The brief appearance of his steel helmet above the sky-line was greeted by a flight of bullets, which smacked into the sand-bags with unpleasant viciousness. The sentry told Jennings a few things about his ancestry and begged Curialo to take him away.

Afterward they had to flatten out against the side of a trench to let a wounded man go by. Two of his mates carried him, holding him by the armpits and the knees. He was unconscious and bloody, but Jennings was not impressed. He had handled scores of such gunshot wound cases.

"Well," he laughed, "I don't think much of your war. I was expecting earthquakes and cat-cataclysms, but this is very tame."

"What more do you want?" retorted Curialo.

"It might be livelier," explained Jennings. "I'd like to see the inside of a front-line dugout, you know. Is this really the front line?"

"Sure is. Hop up here: I'll show you some German wire."

Jennings peered through a narrow slit at an uninspiring vista of rusty wire, tufts of grass, weeds, and a chalky mound, which Curialo asserted was the German line.

"There's not much to see," he remarked. "I'm a bit disappointed."

His headache was getting worse. There was also a dry taste at the back of his mouth which was distinctly unpleasant. The effects of the cognac were beginning to wear off, and he was feeling low and cantankerous. The Legionnaires, on the other hand, were normal and bored. The alcohol having had no effect on them, they suffered from no disastrous reaction.

"If this ain't enough for you," retorted Withers, "stick yer blooming mug over the parapet and see what 'appens."

"Don't be absurd," snapped Jennings.

"I thought you were going to show me something interesting, instead of which—"

"By ——," broke in Curialo. "I'll show you something interesting. Come on!"

He slid off the fire step and started down the trench as quickly as the knee-deep mud would allow.

"'Ere, matey! Where to?" Withers inquired sharply.

"Craters!"

"But we was told—"

"I should worry! I'm going to stick this guy's nose into so much war that he won't be able to breathe."

"That suits me!" agreed Jennings. "I'll take the responsibility on my own shoulders. I want to see these craters very badly."

"What abaht us?" cried Withers. "Responsibility ain't going to keep me alive. That there plice is being shelled something fierce. I been there three perishing days—"

"Bert, if you don't get going I'll choke you," observed Curialo. "We're going to shove this guy in one spot he'll never want to see again."

"But, Gor'struth—"

"I thought as much!" Jennings laughed acidly. "I'm ready to go anywhere—"

"Yus, and if it wasn't for the captain I know where I'd send you," Withers came back angrily. "All right, I'm wiv you. We'll show you the 'orrors of war!"

Then a sergeant with a face convulsed with rage came into the trench and inquired harshly whether their discussion could not be conducted on the other side of Hades. He said things in the Legionnaires' ears which only a sergeant may say, and live, and he wound up by promising them a week's extra duty as soon as he could get in touch with their platoon sergeant.

They went on their way in a much chastened mood. Around a corner they slid into thigh-deep slime which was slowly dribbling in over the parapet as if somewhere close by a dam had burst and flooded the country. The steady *clack-clack* of a hand pump came from across the way, where the Germans were busily pumping water out of their trenches down-hill into the French line.

Jennings tried to speak, and Withers' muddy hand closed tightly over his mouth.

"Keep yer blinking 'ead closed," the cockney whispered hoarsely. "If yer don't we'll get bombed. Just look."

The Legionnaires felt their way forward with great caution, making as little noise as possible, but Jennings splashed and wallowed recklessly. He didn't like the trench, his guides nor himself. His was a perfect hangover and he didn't care whom he annoyed.

His splashings certainly annoyed the Germans, who were less than thirty yards away and on higher ground. A hand-grenade twanged against the wire just over the parapet, rebounded, and burst before touching ground. The force of the explosion threw the three men face downward in the muck.

Before they could move half a dozen grenades burst close to the trench. A fragment of iron struck the brim of Withers' steel helmet. The blow cut open his right eyebrow, which oozed blood. Snipers came to life. There was a swift rush of bullets, and the bombing stopped abruptly.

Half a minute later a coughing noise came from the German line.

"Trench mortar!" grunted Curialo. "Duck!"

They ducked. Even Jennings ducked. A thin whistling sound reached his ears. It grew louder and swifter, cutting the air with a scream. Something thudded into the earth in the next bay, just around the corner. A second dragged by. Jennings started to raise his head—

A crashing detonation struck his ears. The earth belched a fountain of dirt and smoke, which rolled greasily upward, mushroomed, and dissolved in a rain of débris.

"Run!" cried Curialo, plowing his way round the corner.

They tripped and stumbled around the bend, and fell upon a shattered thing that had been a man. The trench was a smoking hole, plastered with red horrors which made Jennings' stomach turn inside out and bite itself. He would have been sick if another bomb had not made him forget everything save the frailty of human life.

The blast of the explosion stunned him. He groped along blindly in pursuit of the Legionnaires, clawing at the muddy banks to increase his speed. He caught up with them in a shallow trench cut in the flank of the mound of earth forming the lip of Crater No. 1.

For the first time he became aware of Withers' blood-smeared face and he saw that Curialo was drawn and haggard. He

was faintly surprized to find himself feeling quite cool and calm. Shell fire wasn't a new experience for him. During the four months he had been driving an ambulance he had run into several long-range bombardments, and on one occasion his automobile had been hit by shrapnel.

Before they had gone many yards a salvo of high explosives burst in a cluster along the far side of the crater. The walls of the trench sagged. Billows of tainted smoke drifted close to the ground.

Another salvo followed close on the heels of the first, and abruptly every German gun for miles around opened fire on the craters. There came an overwhelming rush of sound and the earth spewed its black bowels into the air. A dim twilight settled over the hilltop, a twilight full of bright flashes and alive with the flight of screaming things.

Somehow the three men worked their way along the lip of the crater, crawling on their bellies through slime and over warm corpses. They came to a concreted post where some troopers crouched around a machine-gun. One man was hit by a great hunk of iron even while Jennings' eyes were upon him. He dissolved in a red, wet spray. The survivors heaved the remains aside—

The clamor became immense and overwhelming. The earth lost substance; it foamed and boiled beneath the impact.

"They're going to attack!" Curialo shouted in Jennings' ear. "Better beat it."

"To —— with that!" yelled Jennings. "I'll stay right here. What do I do?"

"Ever thrown a hand-grenade?"

"Sure. Tried down at Verneuil. Got any?"

There was a stock of grenades in a recess by the machine-gun emplacement. Jennings filled the pockets of his tunic with missiles.

A shell struck the edge of the gun pit. Another followed. The pit collapsed. When the smoke cleared Jennings saw that the gun crew was dead. Curialo had lost his steel helmet; caught beneath a mound of loose dirt Withers was fighting like a maniac to free himself.

Again the earth cracked open and belched billows of dust and smoke upon the crouching men. A Legionnaire opened his mouth to shout something in Jennings' ear and before he could speak a single word his lower jaw was torn off. For a fraction of a second he stood motionless, then, mercifully, he dropped into the mud, as a drowning man sinks beneath water. And suddenly Jennings lost his nerve. Handling wounded men at the *poste de secours* was quite different from seeing them ghoulishly dismembered before his eyes. It was inhuman and monstrous—and there was nothing to strike back at. All he could do was to cower in the muck and wait till a shell snuffed him out.

Hysterically he jerked a bomb out of his pocket and hurled it into the gray twilight. He shook his fist and shouted filthy curses at the howling air until Curialo roughly dragged him down. His fit of anger passed. He began to sob.

The bombardment quickened again. Shrapnel spat down through the mist in sudden gusts, like hail.

Man after man, crouching in the shallow ditch, was hit. The survivors sheltered behind the corpses.

Out of nowhere came a runner, dripping mud. The Germans, he said, were already bombing their way around the flank of Crater No. 3. Reinforcements were badly needed. One company of the Fourth Battalion had been cut to pieces. The right flank was up in the air.

The runner had orders to dispatch all men he found toward that right flank.

"Where are we g-going?" stammered Jennings, clinging to Withers' arm.

"A plice what ain't for the likes of you, that's what!" snapped the cockney. "Crying, Gor'blimey! Like a blinking hinfant. You better stay 'ere and wait till hit's hall over."

But Jennings could not bear the thought of being left alone in that inferno. He tagged along behind the string of men who crawled at a snail's pace from hole to hole. They ran into a deluge of fire and steel as they advanced. The party disintegrated, frittered away, broke up into little groups wandering dazedly through the ghostly twilight.

Withers, Jennings and Curialo ended their journey in a water-logged hole which had once been a trench. In front of it a strip of wire had escaped destruction. They sprawled in the mud, hunching their shoulders about their ears as the shrapnel lashed the earth. And after a time the hurricane bombardment rolled farther back on to the reserve lines and the village of Fontaine-au-Bois.

A new sound reached Jennings' ears; the swelling roll of rifle fire and the steady beat of machine-guns. All at once dim figures loomed through the mist and lurched along toward the French lines.

Automatically Withers and Curialo opened fire. They worked like machines, firing and loading with mechanical gestures.

The Germans came on very slowly, appearing, vanishing and appearing again as they slid from one bog into the next. The French counter-barrage closed down upon them, and still they came on in little groups, fighting their way forward a foot, a yard at a time. It seemed as if hours would pass before they could reach the French front line—Yet many seconds had not passed before a hand-grenade burst on the brink of the hole.

When Jennings scrambled to his feet he saw that Withers lay on his side, pressing both hands to his stomach. Between his fingers blood trickled.

A German popped out of the ground not ten feet away. Curialo shot him at point-blank range. Others closed in. The strip of wire held them up. While they hacked at it Withers managed to heave himself to his knees and clutch at his rifle. He fired once, in the air, and fell face foremost into the mud.

"Use them —— bombs!" yelled Curialo. "—— you, now you're up here! Fight, you blubbering fool!"

The hand-grenades! Jennings had forgotten all about them. He grabbed one out of his pocket, yanked out the pin, and hurled it at the men who ran like wolves along the fringe of the wire. More Germans appeared, scrambling through a break in the entanglements. A second bomb halted them. Jennings went mad. He was hitting back at last! Soon he had no missiles to throw and he snatched up Withers' rifle.

A Bavarian who had worked his way in from the flank fell into the hole and died on Curialo's bayonet point. Before the Legionnaire could wrench his weapon clear he was struck on the side of the head by another German. Jennings accounted for that man, stabbing at him savagely until he ceased to struggle.

Then, somewhere in the smoke, a machine-gun began to chatter. It ripped off a long burst of fire, sweeping forth and back across the hole, and the German attack withered away. Bullets skimmed by inches above the rim of the shell-crater, but Jennings, all alone among the dead, heard nothing, saw nothing.

"Come on, you ——!" he shouted. "I'm waiting for you!"

A fresh avalanche of shells fell about it. He was blown off his feet and rolled heels over head like a shot rabbit. But in a flash he was up again, glaring through the mist for fresh foes to conquer.

He was still shouting and cursing when the French reserves came up behind their rolling barrage and plowed their way back among the craters. Most of the fighting was taking place a little farther off to the right where the Germans had gained a solid foothold in the trenches leading to the artillery observation post.

A Frenchman jumped into the smoking shambles beside Jennings. It was Captain Mursaline, commanding the Third Company.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he cried, after having disarmed Jennings who was trying to disembowel him. "What are you doing here?"

"Fighting!" replied Jennings. "I won't surrender!" Then it dawned on him that he was not dealing with enemies but with a friend. "Look at that," he cried. "They didn't get through. I stopped 'em!"

It never occurred to him that the machine-gun might have had something to do with the slaughter.

"I bombed 'em, the devils!"

"Magnificent!" agreed the captain. "But—where are those two men of mine?"

"There—somewhere," said Jennings, gesturing vaguely at the huddled shapes in the mud.

"The *saligots!*" swore the captain. "I told them not to go beyond the Boyau des Crevés."

"Oh, they thought I was frightened," laughed Jennings. "It's my fault—I suggested it."

"When I give an order to a Legionnaire," snapped the captain, "I do not expect to be disobeyed under any circumstances. If they're still alive I'll teach them a few tricks."

But he had other matters to attend to just then.

"My friend," he said warmly, "what you have done is admirable. It shall not be forgotten. In the meantime, stay here—you have done enough. I must go forward."

Then he led his men into the heart of the turmoil and Jennings went with him, for he did not like to stay alone among the dead, his dead.

THREE weeks later, in the square before the *mairie* of the village of Verneuil, *Ambulancier* Thomas Jennings was decorated for "exemplary conduct under fire." The order of the day went on to relate how he had "by his brilliance, tenacity and devotion," inspired other men and had "single-handed" kept the enemy out of a most important position.

The trumpets of the Fourth Battalion of the French Foreign Legion sounded *au champs*, drums rolled and a benevolent colonel kissed Jennings on both cheeks. It was a great day; spring was in the air. The battalion presented arms and the civilian population of Verneuil, including Madame Loppard *et fille*, applauded the *brave garçon Américain*.

Afterward there was a special dinner at ambulance section headquarters at which everybody, including the cook, drank more than was decent or wise. Everybody except Jennings. When the diners reached the singing stage and had forgotten all about him, he slipped away for a quiet chat with Madame Loppard and Emilienne. They said his medal was *tout ce qui se fait de jolie* and gave him a cup of coffee. There was a moon that evening, and Jennings went out with Emilienne to look at it. Finding the moon too bright they retired to the bench by the stable door where they sat side by side and Jennings modestly told Emilienne that he did not deserve a medal. He decided that as soon as the moon went down he would certainly kiss her. The moon hung just over the roof of the cowbarn.

At that precise moment soldiers of second-class, Curialo and Withers, trudged into the barnyard from the roadway. They had been out of hospital four days, and had been welcomed back by a stern-faced captain, who gave them each a week's extra duty as a token of his displeasure. Since then they had alternated their waking hours between defaulter's drill and road-mending under fire.

Life in the Legion is harsh and unforgiving. Attenuating circumstances are unknown and no allowances are made for personal grudges.

They crossed the yard in gloomy silence, for they were too tired to think, and headed for the cowbarn. As they reached the threshold the sound of a woman's voice reached them. They halted, listening.

"But, monsieur," said the voice, "it is not nice what you would do!"

"'At's Emilienne," commented Withers.

"One small kiss, it is not much," pleaded another voice, a man's this time. "It is but little to ask. One kiss. Ah, mam'selle, I would give my medal for such a favor."

"I guess I know that guy," drawled Curialo, shaking off his pack and propping it carefully against the wall. "C'mon, Bert, it's our turn to butt in on a few parties."

"Yus," agreed Withers. "I'm wiv you, matey. Medals! Gor'blimey, fancy 'im being decorated, 'im what was sobbing 'is blinking eyes out!"

They descended upon the couple by the stable door with a heavy tread. Emilienne giggled, but Jennings rose magnificently to the occasion.

"Why, hello boys," he said cheerily. "Back again, I see. All's well that ends well. I'm mighty glad to see you." He turned to the girl with masterly calm. "It is growing chilly, is it not? The night air is not good for one so charming. Perhaps you are going in now, yes? You see, I wish to take these *messieurs* to the Foyer and give them a cup of good coffee. You will excuse me, will you not? And I hear the Legion is soon leaving the sector, so we must talk while there is still time. Good night, mam'selle, my respects to your mother."

Still talking he closed the kitchen door upon her; still talking he led the bewildered Legionnaires up the road toward the Foyer. Meekly they followed him.

"I spoke to Captain Mursaline about you," he exclaimed. "I took all the blame, but he would not listen. But you can bet your boots I'm glad to see you again. We've had some good times together. I know you didn't like me much at first, but that day among the shell holes sort of makes us buddies."

"Yea," agreed Curialo, "maybe it does. Anyway the battalion is pulling out of Verneuil day after tomorrow."

"So I hear. I almost wish I were going—"

"But you ain't! We're going to Verdun, so they say, and let me tell you Verdun's going to be a rest cure after Verneuil."

"Ha ha!" laughed Jennings. "That's a good one!"

His laugh ended in a gurgle. Simultaneously Curialo and Withers hit him; the former hit him on the jaw, the latter in the stomach. The double knockout was complete and final. Jennings dropped into the grass by the roadside and stayed there.

"I guess that'll hold him for a while," exclaimed Curialo.

"Yus," agreed Withers. "'E'll learn to leave blokes like us well enough alone."

They adjusted their helmets at the correct angle and swaggered back to their billet. They found Emilienne filling a pail of water at the pump.

"Hello there, girlie," quoth Curialo. "He is finished, the much-bemedaled one. He will bother you no more."

"And how about a little drop of Three Star?" added Withers. "It is thirsty work, this demolishing of heroes."

"You have injured him!" cried Emilienne, dropping the pail and clutching at her throat. "You have killed him. Animals that you are, begone, for I hate you! It takes two pigs such as you are to assassinate so fine a gentleman. It is his medal of which you are jealous. I am through with dirty Legionnaires. Go, before I call the *gendarmes!*"

The kitchen window was flung open and Madame Loppard thrust her head out.

"What is wrong?" she called out. "Emilienne, I demand to know what is wrong!"

Before Emilienne could answer, the two Legionnaires, utterly defeated, slouched across the yard and stumbled into the darkness of the cowbarn.

ANNOUNCEMENT:

THE next issue of Adventure *will be the January 1st issue and will appear on that date. After that* Adventure *will be issued on the first and fifteenth of each month on the exact date that appears on the cover. It will save confusion if readers will make note of the publication date of the first January number.*

The Last Legion

~ *and Gray Maiden, the Sword*

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

NOTE—Each story in this series is built around a group of characters, but the real hero—or heroine—is the sword, Gray Maiden, which is traced from its forging through the different hands that wielded it down to modern times. Made for the greatest of the Pharaohs, it saw the rise of Greece and the crowning of Alexander's fortunes; it was witness to the majesty and the decay of Rome; it held back the rush of Islam; it knew the birth-pangs of the New World and the last agonies of the Old. There are wide gaps in its history: For generations it was hidden in tomb or burial mound or hung in grim quietude upon the walls of armories. Yet often when men turned to war eager hands reached out for it and swung its shining blade in the van of battle. As some medieval owner scratched in the hard gray steel:

Gray Maide men hail Mee
Deathe doth Notte fail Mee.

TO THE Senator Anicius Manlius Severinus Bœtius, Consular, at Rome, from G. Flavius Domitianus, Count of the Bononian Shore, these, by favor of the holy Modius:

It is a voice from the outer darkness which speaks to you by this pen, O Anicius. One encompassed by the myriads of the Barbarians, his humble talents devoted to the crude policies of a savage king, may well hesitate to address you who have sat in the cerule chair and borne the highest dignity beneath the purple. Yet I am emboldened by two facts: One is the memories, always treasured, of those early days on the slopes of the Pincian when we stole moments from the "Lives of the Saints" to sample the splendors of the Mantuan; the other, my recollection of your curiosity concerning all events applying to the philosophy of life.

You have been kind enough to express gratitude for my comments on the Christianizing of my Frankish employers—no, I will put pride aside, be honest and call them masters—and so it may be that you will discover profit in this narrative of an experience which has racked my soul to its foundations and stirred me to doubt the very basis of the faith the priests would bid us believe shall mold the world anew.

I know that you will not judge me hastily, friend of my youth, who have refused to forget our pagan forefathers simply because they were pagan. Must Cicero and Lucretius be condemned to hellfire for the crime of having lived before the revelation of Christ? No, no! Or if it be so, then I'll choose to go with them. Rather the old

gods of our ancestors, my Anicius, than a Christian God of injustice. And who shall say that Rome has had justice of Christ? Calamity after calamity, until a Barbarian sits in the palace of the Cæsars and the Conscript Fathers are become the puppets of his will! We are scourged for the sins of our ancestors, say the priests. O God of any faith, what mockery! What virtues do these Barbarian converts possess that our forefathers lacked? What claim upon divine assistance have the heathen Saxons who ravage today what once was Roman—and Christian—Britain? And this brings me belatedly to the subject of my tale, a truly marvelous tale, my Anicius, stimulating to Roman pride, crying aloud for Roman pity. But be yourself the judge. I will tell it as it happened, thus:

TWO days since the *optio* commanding the Julius Tower by the quay summoned me by messenger, saying a ship of the Sea-Wolves was heading into port. It is seldom, indeed, that any ship puts into Bononia*, which, in former times, even after it had lost the name of Gesoriacum, was thronged with traders, but is now, as it were, a *castra mare* on the far edge of the world. Here even the Barbarians stay their feet, for beyond is only the restless desert of the Western Ocean. But at intervals these Sea-Wolves, wildest of all the Barbarians, appear along the neighboring shores and inspire with terror the ruthless Franks, who, to say truth, are as agitated by such visitations as are your peasants of Latium or Etruria by the raids of the Lombards against whom the Goths protect them. My task, as you know, is to safeguard this coast, and to conciliate my pride the Franks permit me to retain the old title which was established when the evacuation of Britain did away with the Count of the Saxon Shore, who had been charged with the prevention of piracy. Yes, and not alone do they yield me my traditional office, but the troops under my command, in name at least, are the same bodies that Honorius stationed here, if we are to credit the Notitia of his reign, in which are inscribed the garrisons of the several frontiers.

So I ordered out the Ninth Alan Cohort, in which, I do assure you, O Anicius, there are no less than a score and a half of Alans and two Roman centurions, not to speak of one who is Roman on the mother's side, and

* Boulogne.

the rank and file stout Franks, who worship God very fervently because King Clovis bade them to. And with my Alans I marched down to the quay to receive the Sea-Wolves as became them.

But imagine my amazement when these strangers, instead of showering us with arrows from a distance and saluting us with indecent cries and gestures, rowed into the port very awkwardly and in silence, quite as if their doing so was a natural thing to be expected. I was so dumbfounded that they were within javelin-throw and inside the range of the tower catapult before I took thought to my responsibility and hailed them to yield to us. I did not think it likely they would understand me, so in the same breath I shouted to my archers to bend their bows and had the catapult discharged.

Of course the stone flew over their heads, but it made a mighty splash which rocked their vessel near to swamping, whereupon arose one among them dressed like myself and replied to me in our Latin tongue! Yes, as good Latin as you shall hear any day in the Forum, albeit with something of a throaty accent and a slurring of final syllables.

"Are you Barbarians here?" he hailed. "Is this the way to receive a Roman officer in a Roman port?"

"Roman officer!" I gasped. "Who ever heard of a Roman officer in a longship of the Sea-Wolves?"

He threw back his ragged old brown cloak very haughtily and he might have been Cæsar when he answered—

"I asked a question."

"So you did," I agreed sarcastically. "And I will answer it. I am Domitianus, Count of the Bononian Shore. You are within my jurisdiction, and all men, save King Clovis himself, must hold obedience to me therein. Now do you answer *me!*"

But he shook his head, puzzled.

"King Clovis—who is he?"

I gaped at him.

"Whence do you come who can ask such a question?" I stammered. "Who are you?"

He signed to his men to pull up by the quay, and they managed it with the strong awkwardness I had observed before. As they drew alongside I saw, too, that they were a mixed lot: Some of them dressed like my own legionaries in tattered leather jerkins and rusty *loricæ*, others hairy and clad in skins and bright-colored woolen cloths. The armored men had the look of drilled troops; the hairy fellows were as wild a set of untamed Barbarians as you can find anywhere north of Gaul. Their leader stepped ashore without a word from me, and not until then did he answer my last questions.

"I am Quintus Arrius Mabonius, Senator of Viroconion* and Legate of the Sixth Legion, Victrix."

He said it, my Anicius, as you might say, "At what hour do we dine?" I stared at him a long time. It was one of my two Roman centurions who replied to him.

"But—but there is no Sixth Legion!"

"Why, no," I assented. "The Sixth was struck off ages ago. It is not on the rolls. It was destroyed—that is, it disappeared nigh a century of years past."

The stranger smiled quietly. He was a man of middle height, a true Roman in face and build, stocky, with a huge chest and broad shoulders, and a nose and chin like those on the busts of the old Cæsars in the Capitol. He was young, compared to us; but his hair was flecked with gray, and there were deep lines in his cheeks, which were decently shaven. His armor was clean and polished, but he had no sword, only a light staff in his hand. I know men, O Anicius, and this man, I perceived at once, was one to be depended on. So much, to be sure, any one must have seen from the way his crew kept their eyes on his face, and jumped to obey his slightest gesture. Yes, a soldier.

"The Sixth may not be on your rolls," he said, "yet I can assure you it—" a spasm wrenched his features—"it is here."

He waved one hand toward the longship nuzzling the shattered platform of the quay—these Franks keep nothing in repair; a stone the frost works loose is always left to fall.

"For all that century of years," he went on, "it fought honorably to maintain the repute it brought into Britain. Victorious it was called, and Victorious it died—except the few of us you see here. Viroconion was its tomb."

"Where is this Viroconion?" I asked, striving to collect my wits.

Now, at mention of this name one of the crew of the longship leaped ashore beside his leader and burst into a torrent of words in a tongue which sounded to me like rain spitting in the chimney, strutting back and forth and waving his arms in the fashion of a

* Wroxeter.

third-rate actor. He was an absurd person, short in stature, bandy-legged, with a large head and a tangled red beard and long tangled red hair.

"Is this man crazed with suffering?" I appealed to Mabonius.

He smiled again.

"Oh, no, he is a poet. That is a song he has made: 'The Death-Song of the White Town in the Valley.' It is the song of the end of Viroconion, the fairest of the cities of Britain."

"Of Britain!" I gasped.

But he had not heeded me. Turning to the bandy-legged man, he spoke to him gently, touched him on the arm, and the flow of words was stopped. The poet bowed his head and dropped back into the long-ship.

"Llywarch Hen mourns the death of his master, Prince Kyndylan," continued Mabonius. "To him it is not so much the end of the White Town, but the passing of Kyndylan the Fair, which must be sung." His lips crinkled in a satirical grimace. "But his poet's mind can not resist the overwhelming tragedy of the death of a town. A city is greater than a man, even though that man be a prince."

I discovered my wits at last.

"These are strange words that you speak," I said sternly. "First, it is of a legion long forgotten—which you say is newly destroyed. Then it is of the end of a city. Next, it is of a prince's death. You have much to render account for. You claim to be a Roman?"

He favored me a second time with his satirical grimace.

"All free-born men in the Empire are citizens of Rome," he answered, "but I am descended from a family which earned the privilege under the Republic!"

"There are older families," I retorted, no less sternly, "and the title is not so honorable as it once was."

His hand went to where his sword-hilt should have been.

"No true Roman would say that," he said.

"There is no such thing as a true Roman," I replied. "Whence do you come, stranger from the sea, that you should be as ignorant of the world as though you were not of it?"

There came upon his face a smile most piteously mournful.

"Count of the Bononian Shore, I begin to believe that Britain must be a different world," he said.

"Do you mean to claim that you are come hither from Britain?" I exclaimed.

"I do," he declared proudly. "I am a Roman Briton, a Senator of Viroconion—or of what was Viroconion, for all is gone. Cenric the West Saxon has leveled the walls, the house-roofs gap to the sky, the churches are dens for the wolf. Yes, it is as Llywarch Hen has sung: 'Its halls are without life, without fire, without song.' "

"But man, you speak madness," I cried. "No one has come out of Britain since my grandfather's time! It is a waste inhabited by the Northern pirates. For three generations the Saxons have desolated it."

"Not all of it," he corrected me. "I grant you they have ravished the fairest sections of the land, but in the West a line of cities have kept the Roman tradition, and behind them the Silurian* Mountains and the rough moors of Damonia† have provided shelter for many more folk of the British tribes that never took kindly to Roman ways. We are ill-assorted, we of the cities and the mountains, but we have one interest in common in the enmity of the Saxons and their allies. Until now we have kept our freedom, but the fall of Viroconion means the end of all else—unless the emperor send us aid."

It was incredible, my Anicius, but I believed him implicitly. And around us had collected a knot of my centurions and *optios* who could understand Latin, and I saw on their faces the same expression of awe mingled with consternation. Even the Barbarians, Alans and Franks, comprehended the drama of the moment.

"There is no emperor," I said.

"No emperor?" he repeated.

"Not in the West," I amended. "In Constantinople, yes. But he has no interest in Britain. All he asks is to be able to hold his own against the Persians and the Scythians."

"But you? You are Roman! And I see other Roman faces. Your soldiers have Roman discipline, wear Roman dress. This town—" His eye caught the broken coping of the quay and he shook his head slightly—"No, that is not Roman, not what we Romans of Britain call Roman."

His glance roved to the cohort's standard and his features lighted eagerly.

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*Welsh—really South Welsh.
†Cornwall.

"But you carry an eagle!" he protested.

"Yes, we carry an eagle," I assented sadly, "and it is true, O man from another world, that certain of us—myself, a few others—may claim Roman citizenship. It is true that Rome still exists, true that the senate meets in the Capitol, true that each year consuls are elected for the Western as well as the Eastern Empire. It is true that this cohort and others, some, not many, keep up the Roman discipline. It is true that the Frankish king, Clovis, gives employment to many of us Romans who served in Gaul before he conquered it. True, also, that Christ is worshiped in the temples of Gaul as He was before the last emperor died. It is true, as I said, that Rome still exists—but Rome is dead. Theodoric the Goth is King of Italy. Clovis the Frank is King of Gaul. We Romans are their men. They rule, not we."

"I do not understand," he said dumbly. "Surely, the legions—"

I cut him short. This was dangerous ground. Already we had discussed openly in presence of the Barbarians subjects best kept for such intimate communications as this, my Anicius.

"There is much you do not understand," I answered. "Yet if you will be guided by my advice all shall be made plain to you."

He sensed a hidden meaning in my interruption and his glance shifted keenly from my face to the others surrounding us, a couple of dark, thick-browed Romans, the rest towering, bearded Barbarians.

"You are wise," he conceded. "This place is public for discussion. If my men might have food and wine—"

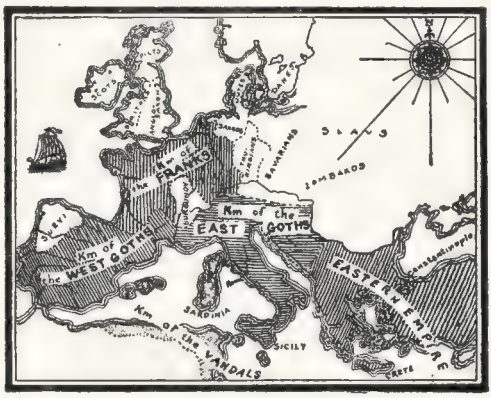
"They shall have full rations," I promised. "And if you will be my guest I will endeavor to prove that however unworthy may be our station we Romans are still capable of appreciating the honor of meeting a brave man, especially when he happens to be a Roman."

He bowed as became a senator, draping his cloak togawise across his armor.

"I am honored, Count of the Bononian Shore. I had been cast down, but you—"

"There is no reason for you to be aught but cast down," I interposed hastily. "Your plight is a disgrace to all Romans, and there is little enough I can do for you. But come."

We posted sentries on the quay to keep the rabble from the longship, and after I had given orders for food to be provided the Britons and Mabonius had instructed them briefly, he rode with me up to my quarters in the Prætorium above the town. We said little on the way. My own thoughts were bitter, and my companion seemed to be occupied in studying the sights of the town. I have described it all to you before, O Anicius, and you tell me it is much like your Rome of today: grass sprouting betwixt the



paving for lack of cart-wheels, two people where once were three, priests, priests, priests, monks, monks, monks, our Gauls—or your Romans—scurrying meekly about such business as fortune affords them, and the Barbarians in the background, sucking up the taxes. Somewhat of this I explained to Mabonius and he heard me, tight-lipped.

"I begin to understand," he said as we dismounted in the court of the Prætorium. "Your Franks are in some ways the same as our Saxons. Both are Barbarians. But there is this difference—and it is a wide one: your Franks are Christians like the rest of you. They ask only the right to rule and deal gently with Gaul and Roman—"

"Oh, they are kind masters!" I admitted. "Kinder than we deserve, if the truth be known. But what irks, and must ever irk, is that *they* are masters, in *our* place."

There was a guard of Gaulish cavalry, *cataphracti*, the best *alæ*, in my command, and they turned out for me as I rode into the Prætorium—gigantic mailed riders on tall mailed horses, a spectacle to move a soldier's heart. I glimpsed the flash in the Britain's eye and asked him if he would inspect the guard.

"Gladly," he said, then hesitated. "But no, I have no sword."

"You do not require a sword," I replied.

But he would not cross the courtyard with me.

"I can not inspect soldiers," he insisted, "for I sold my sword. It is not fitting that your men should be paraded for me."

"By all the Saints, you are a queer fellow!" I protested. "And they are paraded for me, not for you. But I am more interested in hearing your story than in arguing with you. We will dismiss the guard, if you please, and try a skin of Coan wine."

IT WAS that you sent me, O Anicius, beautiful, vibrant stuff, vastly different from the muddy juice they call wine in Gaul. With a drink or two of it under my belt I feel myself expanding, gliding back across the years. I hear the old legions stamping by, the whine of the catapults at Jerusalem, the thundering hoofs across the Catalaunian Plain the day Attila's Huns were hammered to defeat! Mars knows, it is no Christian feeling! And much the same was the influence it exerted on this waif from another world, this chip from the rim of the whirlpool where Roman and Barbarian, Christian and heathen, struggle for God knows what.

Mabonius quaffed his goblet with an echo of my sigh of satisfaction.

"This is what Horace sang of, eh? I turn to him when my ears grow weary of the mouthings and posturings of Llywarch Hen. But I suppose all poets are the same if you must meet them in the flesh. Q. Flaccus drank beyond his due, you know."

"What do you know of Horace?" I queried, amused.

He quoted promptly:

> "What have the fatal years not brought of ill?
> Our fathers' age, as their sires' not so good,
> Bred us ev'n worse than they; a brood
> We'll leave that's viler still."

"Is that apt to the times? By what you say, it should be. St. Alban be my witness, it's the pith and whole of Britain's plight!"

I ignored the pathos of his last remark in my stimulated astonishment at the sonorous ease with which he had fitted in that quotation—you remember it, my Anicius? The Sixth Ode of the Third Book, "Of Rome's Degeneracy." Five hundred years ago Horace wrote it to chide a Rome that was just embarking upon her last climb to greatness. And today it is more apposite than ever! After all, what is Time?

"But where do you learn Horace in Britain—you, who, by your own story, must battle with the heathen?"

"We are not savages," he returned, with a hint of mockery. "At Corinium * there is a good Academy—and some of the priests refuse to despise true learning. But I forgot, I doubt if Corinium lasts much longer, and in any case, there will be no pupils for the Academy. Yes, the day draws near when the Britons must subsist upon the poetry and learning of Llywarch Hen and his kind. We have shot our bolt. And if you can give me no hope of aid from Rome, why, I am a fool for my pains, and might better have used the chance I bought to escape to Deva † or Isca Silurum.‡ They will need soldiers in either place. Here you have plenty—of a sort."

"They are not Roman soldiers, remember that," I answered without losing my temper. "Rome is a name, nothing more. Roman citizenship is an honor so empty the Barbarians do not envy it."

He fixed me with glowing eyes. They were not Roman eyes. Somewhere in his past there must have been a fair Barbarian mother, for they shone brightly blue against the tanned swarthiness of his skin.

"Yet you say there is an emperor in Constantinople? And the senate still meets—and each year you have a new consul?"

"For the emperor in Constantinople," I replied, shrugging my shoulders, "take my advice and forget him. He pretends, and Theodoric in Rome, and Clovis here in Gaul, permit him to pretend—yes, pretend with him—that he is Roman Emperor of the world. There is naught said of it, no homage asked or given. It is simply that some of the old forms are kept up, because the Barbarians like them. Rome dies, but there is a majesty in the name. It is like a great man's statue, cold to the touch, warm to the imagination. Some day the Barbarians will weary of Roman forms and ceremonies or perhaps other Barbarians will come in and conquer the Goths and the Franks as they conquered us, and then the last vestige of Rome will vanish. It may be the Capitol will be torn stone from stone, and Rome become like that city—what was it you called it?—the White City—"

*Cirencester. † Chester. ‡ Caerleon-on-Usk.

"Viroconion!"

The name was music on his lips.

"Ah, no! God in heaven, no! You do not realize what you say. You have not seen all that your fathers had labored for for four hundred years hacked and battered into shapeless ruin by Barbarians beside whom these Franks of yours are cultured philosophers. What have you here in Gaul suffered compared to us? Nothing! With us it is freedom or slavery, victory or extirpation. With you it is no more than new masters—rude, perhaps, but kindly—and Christians who reverence the Blessed Jesus. I tell you there is no comparison. You may bemoan a loss in trade—hurt pride that the Roman name has only the echo of its former potence. But we—we have seen two-thirds of our land, our finest cities, harried and wrecked, so that where a hundred families might find food the Saxons themselves can not live without stealing from our settlements or harrying the mainland."

I could not gainsay the man, my Anicius. Indeed, he inspired me with a humbleness I am unaccustomed to.

"Tell me," I asked, "how it is that Britain is so shut off from intercourse? It has been a common saying for two men's lives that it was become no more than the haunt of the Saxon pirates."

"You have answered your own question, Count of the Bononian Shore," he said, with his wry smile. "We have been driven off the sea and our harbors sealed by the swarms of pirate craft. Hemmed in ashore by the waves of Barbarians that have pushed us farther and farther into the West, we have had no opportunity to pass oversea. Twice in my day it was tried, but each time the men who attempted it were captured by the pirates who blockade the coasts."

"And this side of the water there has been no fleet to check them in so long a time that I doubt if there are shipwrights living who could contrive the framework of a trireme!" I growled.

"The Barbarians!" exclaimed Mabonius. "The world goes to pieces because of them. I was taught in school that they poured out of some unknown reservoir of men in the dim recesses of the East, one tribe jostling the other, fighting and brawling their way toward a more comfortable homeland."

"You were taught correctly," I assented sourly. "It is so. I think it will always be so. In the long run, no doubt, they will possess the earth. But here is no occasion to discuss philosophy, my friend—if I may call you so? Thanks, you are a man I can talk frankly to. No, I must hear from you some explanation of the extraordinary claim you make. You are Legate, you said, of the Sixth Legion, and—"

"And that is the truth," he cut me off stiffly.

"But think, man! The Sixth, Victrix!"

I reached over and snapped open the chest in which I keep my scrolls of records and accounts, among others a fair copy of that Notitia, which some emperor—I fancy Honorius—had prepared in imitation of the Antonines to show the distribution of the Empire's defenses. And I unrolled it to the sheet which noted the defenses of Britain.

"See," I urged him. "This list is a century old. It concerns the last days of the Empire, as an Empire. And here you have the Sixth, Victrix—at Eburacum * and on the Wall."

"Precisely," replied Mabonius smoothly. "At Eburacum and on the Wall. Mostly, it was on the Wall. The Sixth and a few cohorts of auxiliaries held the Wall long enough to give our people in the south a chance to stand off the Saxons before the Picts broke through from the north, and made things worse. That was in my great-grandfather's time."

"But to get back to the Sixth," I reminded him. "You will note, it is shown here. And that is its last showing in the records. It disappears."

"What of the other legions that were then in Britain?" he asked.

"The Second (Augusta) was brought back to Gaul, and I think it broke up in one of the civil wars, oh, a generation past. The Twentieth (Valeria Victrix) was brought over by Stilicho more than a hundred years ago to help against Alaric. Old men have told me it was cut to pieces in some battle in Pannonia. Most of the old legions are gone. You'll find one here and there, generally in the east, but it's not usual. Most of the old *numeri* and auxiliary cohorts and *alæ* have disappeared, too. Everything is different. The world is different—so why should soldiers expect that there should be no change in an army, which really is no longer an army but a band of Barbarian mercenaries?"

*York.

He let me rant to a finish.

"You are bitter," he said quietly. "It will be easier, then, for you to appreciate my bitterness. The Sixth was *not* destroyed. It was used up over and over again, its ranks filled, first, with our North Britains, afterward with men of every tribe and city of those that professed to follow Roman ways. My grandfather became a tribune in it; my father was legate, appointed by the senates of the Border Cities, which bore the brunt of its upkeep; I was appointed to succeed him after he died."

His armor clashed as he straightened involuntarily.

"It was not such a legion as it was when it came to Britain. The year the storm broke, I have been told it numbered scarce a thousand men—"

"All the legions were under-strength in those days," I struck in. "It was one of Constantine's cursed policies."

"That I do not know," replied Mabonius, "but I do know that we filled its ranks in the beginning to five thousand men, and in my time of command it could muster three thousand with the Eagles. Men, mind you! Soldiers! As good heavy infantry as ever stepped. Not mountaineers like Llywarch Hen and his friends. *They* are good light troops, unsteady under pressure, but savage fighters, stout bowmen and fleet of foot. But when it came to the shock, to meeting the heathens' Shield-Wall, my legionaries and the *cataphracti* of the Icenian Horse always bore the brunt. To the very last! The very last! They—they are under the stones of Viroconion. Cenric won no slaves of us. He admitted it to me. Not a bad man, that heathen, a fighter. He offered to adopt me, but I—I preferred to buy my liberty after I learned his ambition, thinking that I might gain succor for our folk from Rome."

I poured more wine. A man always talks better with a wet tongue.

"Tell me," I invited him. "I am interested in your position, Briton. I have told you, and I tell you again, that I doubt if I can serve you at all—or any other man! But tell me, and if I can see my way to further your mission be sure I will. Only—tell all, as one soldier tells another. Otherwise, I can not judge fairly of the matter."

"You mean: tell the truth," he retorted in his quiet way, almost jeering. "But what is truth to one man is a lie to another. If you find cause to doubt anything I say, ask me more of it. I will explain. For I am honest with you in that I must win help for our people in Britain. I *must!* Else the end is in view. And I can not believe that Rome will let us come to that. When the Emperor Anthemius was beset by the Barbarians, long after Honorius had bidden us shift for ourselves, we sent twelve thousand men to help him, two strong legions, although we could ill spare them. Give us those twelve thousand back, and we will fling the Barbarians into the sea!"

He drained his replenished cup.

"Well, that is boasting, and pushes me nowhere. I will tell my story."

"WAIT," I said. "Before you begin your story instruct me further how matters stand in Britain. What is the division betwixt you and the Barbarians?"

"A soldier's question," he approved, and dipped a finger in the wine-lees. "Here is the island's shape. It is much longer than it is wide, you see, and broadest in the south. The eastern and southern parts, where were our richest cities, facing toward Gaul and the Saxon Shore, are low-lying and fertile. Here it is that the Saxons, and other Barbarians, who sometimes fight against them and sometimes assist them, have settled. The midlands are forests and fens. Today they are debatable ground, the best barrier we have against the Barbarians, who must travel their wastes to reach our borders.

"We who hold true to Rome are forced back into this block of mountainous country, which is thrust out into the sea betwixt Britain and Ireland—"

"And what of Ireland?" I asked. "A monk I met lately told me it was the richest land in the world."

Mabonius laughed shortly.

"He was Irish? He would. It is a land of strong men and lovely dark women and the best breed of horses I know; but except for piety it has no riches—nor ever did. It is so poor that the heathen avoid it, for all it affords them is hard blows. Yet I would not seem to decry it unduly, for the Irish send us many fine soldiers and horses which are better mounts for the *cataphracti* than the ponies of our hill country, although in recent years the fleets of the Barbarians have interfered to curtail the traffic to and fro.

"They are akin, the Irish, to Llywarch

Hen's folk, the true Britons, and much like them, quarrelsome and forever falling apart. That is the reason why the Barbarians have had the better of us. If it were not for the cities all Britain would have been conquered long ago. It is we Romans—" his shoulders squared, his chin lifted aggressively—"who make resistance possible, for we keep up the Roman walls and Roman discipline.

"You see here in this map I have made how a river—it is called Sabrina *—runs across more than half of the eastern face of our mountainous country. But south of it, across its estuary, is the land of Damnonia, not so mountainous, but very rugged, and the dwellers therein are little squat men, who fight cleverly from ambush. When they are not fighting they are mining tin. There are no cities worth mention in Damnonia, only the bare moors and the little miners who never strike a foe, except from cover. But alone with us of the Border Cities and the Britons of the Silurian mountains they have kept free of the Barbarian yoke."

"What of these Border Cities?" I asked.

"I was coming to them. First, below Sabrina, is Aquæ Sulis,† which once was famous through the Empire for its baths. Ah, I see you have heard of it! Great woods interpose betwixt it and the south coasts, where the Saxons are established. These, its walls and the valor of our legionaries have maintained it, but it must fall very soon, for it is isolated from the other cities of the border and is not sufficiently close to Damnonia to draw strength from the little Folk of the Tin. Beyond it, and west of Sabrina, lies Isca Silurum, which in the beginning was called Castra Legionum, because it was the fortress of the Second Legion in the old days when the mountain Britons were as untamed as the Saxons who now oppress them. It is the mightiest fortress in Britain. When it falls, Rome has fallen."

"Rome has fallen," I gibed.

His head snapped back.

"Not in Britain," he retorted. "So long as a Roman city is free the Roman spirit shall endure."

"I am well rebuked," I acknowledged. "Proceed—last of the Romans!"

He signed himself with the Cross.

"The Blessed Virgin avert so dire a consequence! Let me but have twelve thousand men, trained troops, heavy infantry and *cataphracti*, and we will clear Britain of the Barbarians—and make a new Rome."

"Constantine made a new Rome—in the East," I returned. "When he did that he threw the West away."

"It is in the West that *we* hold out," exclaimed Mabonius. "In the westernmost corner of the westernmost Roman land. Perhaps that is a symbol, Count of the Bononian Shore."

"We talk of military matters, not of symbols," I reminded him.

For, indeed, my Anicius, he made me ashamed, with his steadfastness of belief. What is life without faith? Yet how regain a faith which has fled? Tell me, have I put my finger on the canker-worm which rotted the fiber of Rome's greatness? I wonder!

"True," he agreed. "But the symbols Rome left us are the backbone of our defense, for they remind us daily of the heritage of our fathers."

"We talk a different language here," I said roughly. "Get on with your cities. Isca Silurum was the last. And the next?"

He sighed.

"Yes, yes, Rome is not the same," he admitted sadly. "A broken coping to the quay, and a Roman officer who no longer believes in Roman destiny!"

"Now you talk sense," I growled. "Rome is no more."

For a while he said nothing, dabbling his finger in the wine spilt on the table.

"When I found the sword I thought it was a sign from God," he muttered finally. "My men all said it would bring a happy turn to our fortune. And but for it I should not be here."

* The Severn. † Bath.

"What sword is this?" I asked him. "Of what do you speak?"

Mabonius roused himself.

"The sword? The sword is my story. But let me finish what I began. I told you of Isca Silurum. Well, we cross Sabrina again and come to Corinium, and north a ways, also on the east bank, lies Glevum*. They are stately cities, as Roman as Rome, our fathers claimed. After Glevum the country northward becomes marshy along Sabrina's course, and there are no more cities on the Border until you reach Viroconion. But I forget—" his face clouded—"Viroconion is a ruin. But while it stood it was the middle bulwark of the Border, like the handle of a door. Southward, Isca Silurum was one hinge; northward, Deva was the other."

"And those are all your cities?"

"All those on the Border. And they are the fairest we have left. Deva, like Isca Silurum, was a legionary fortress. The Fourteenth, Gemina Martia, built it. Only Isca is stronger today. As for those beyond the Border, from Regnum† on the south coast to Eburacum under the shadow of the Wall, they are heaps of stone."

"This Wall," I said. "Is it—"

He shuddered.

"I saw it once. We had driven a foray far north to teach the Barbarians a lesson; if you strike at them vigorously they respect you the more. And one day at sunset we rode out of a forest on to a bare hillside, and across a valley was a line of towers that rose and dipped, lifted and sank, with a gray thread of wall between, from horizon's end to horizon's end. And nowhere a sign of life, not so much as a plume of smoke! Blessed Saints, what desolation! We camped by one of the mile-castles that night and I poked this out of a heap of rubbish in the guard-room." He pointed to his belt-buckle of tarnished silver, with the worn inscription: "Leg VI."

"My own legion, you see. The castle was in astonishingly good condition. Oh, the ramp was overgrown with lichen, and bushes and even small trees sprouted in the parapets; but it was defensible as it stood. So was most of the wall. My men found a shallow breach a mile or two east, but we could have repaired it in a day. On one tower was the wreckage of a catapult, the long casting-arm propped above the battlements. All the Wall lacked, all it ever lacked, was men to hold it. It—it made us very sad, discouraged. We lost interest in our foray, after that. The work seemed futile. Do you understand? Here was the wall which Hadrian had built for all time, and it had endured for all time; but as Horace said in that verse I quoted you, our fathers had bred a vile brood of sons. Yes, Rome's sons had failed her—not the brick and stone she had shaped for her purpose."

"I understand," I assured him. "You are not the first to nourish that thought."

He stared at me, half-disapproving.

"But it does not stir you to resentment!"

"Resentment!" I jeered. "What could I accomplish by it? What have you accomplished by it?"

"I don't know," he acknowledged. "It is in God's providence. When I had the sword—"

"God's providence! Briton, you talk like a priest. And what properties had this sword, which, as I remember, you said you sold? Why did you sell it, if it was so valuable?"

He smiled gently, seeming to penetrate the pettiness of my spleen.

"I sold it to come hither," he answered. "If my coming secures help for my people the sword will have saved Britain. Also, it bought—albeit without pledge—a truce for the balance of the year, seeing that Viroconion cost Cenric so many lives that he can not afford to resume the war until he has received reinforcements of Barbarians from oversea."

"A good price," I admitted. "If there was an emperor to turn the advantage to account for you. But we are stumbling in the dark. Go on with your story."

His smile became melancholy.

"You give me scant encouragement. Well, for that you are not to blame. And perhaps the sword has achieved all it can for us. Surely, if it fights for Cenric as it fought for me— But I talk at random. We will go back to the beginning of things.

"IN THE spring word came to us from the Fen Folk, who dwell in the woodlands betwixt us and the Saxons, that Cenric would launch a great stroke against the Border Cities. I was at Isca Silurum with the Sixth and several *alæ* of horse, and we had detachments of light troops out on the roads by which the Barbarians might

* Gloucester. † Chichester.

advance. Usually they come by one of two ways: the old Middle Road up from what was Londinium,* direct toward Viroconion, or the South Road which skirts the vast Wood of Anderida and strikes the Border at Glevum, with byways toward Aquæ Sulis and the Damnonian Marches. The Middle Road is the most direct, but they have more chance of surprizing us when they come from the south, so I was not surprized by a message from Aquæ that the Barbarians were reported landing under Vectis.†

"There was a Council of Notables, one of of the curses of Britain, legates from the cities and the different kings and princes of the free tribes. The cities were for making me consul, with absolute powers; the kings and princes, as always, were jealous of the cities and one another. The compromise reached was the one employed on every similar occasion: I was named to command the cities' troops and Kyndylan, Prince of the Cornovians, was put forward by the free tribes to command their contingents.

"'There are more of our men than of yours,' they said.

"And that is true.— But all their men are not worth two cohorts of legionaries when the Saxon Shield-Wall must be broken.

"Again, I was for waiting before we went out to meet the Barbarians, so that we might find them on our own ground. But Kyndylan and his friends cried that it would be cowardly to permit the invaders to wreak more harm to the Border. It was strong talk, and they won over with it the legates of Aquæ and Corinium, who were most exposed to attack from the south. And the consequence was that I was directed to march south at once, seek the enemy and pursue them to the sea. I had the Sixth, an *ala* of the Icenian *cataphracti*, a few troops of light-horse, Damnonians and Silurians, and Kyndylan's Britons, javelin-men and archers, a valiant, disorderly mob.

"We marched by way of Aquæ Sulis, and took the road east over the hills to Cunetio,‡ and then southeast through very rough country to what used to be Calleva Atrebatum.‖ The walls were standing; most of the houses were intact. A city of ghosts. Just beyond it we encountered our first Barbarians, a shipload or two, perhaps tenscore men, plundering tombs along the wayside. I thought for a while they must be the bait for an ambush, and I sent my mounted men after them to spring whatever trap might have been laid for us. But they were unsupported. We harried them unmercifully and then retired at evening to a ruined villa on the Calleva road, where we might rest behind walls. You can never be too wary of these Barbarians; they are always cunning and resourceful—as I was soon to discover.

"Near this villa was a group of tombs in a little glade, with a battered altar to the *genius loci*. The Barbarians had tumbled the capstone off one tomb, and I ordered a squad of my legionaries to lift it back into place. After all, it was a Roman grave. An *optio* called to me that within the stone casing was a leaden coffin, and I walked across the glade to examine it. One of the Barbarians had sunk his ax into the metal, and through the gash there was a gray gleam, almost as if an eye winked up at us in the twilight. I was curious. 'Who lies here?' I inquired. A centurion pointed his *vitis* at the inscription on the capstone: 'Decius Maximus, Prefect of Britannia Prima, and the Sword of his Destiny.' 'Ha,' said I, 'let us have a look at this sword of Decius!'

"The legionaries pried off the leaden lid with their broadswords, and there before us lay the dried fabric of a man in extreme old age, white-haired, his armor scrolled and enameled, his helmet the work of a goldsmith. In his skeleton-fingers was clutched a long gray sword of a steel I have never seen in any other weapon. I suppose the coffin was sealed against dampness, which would account for the blade's being rustless; but that was not the only peculiar characteristic it had. Its surface was marked with a multitude of convoluted lines and whorls, and graven in the metal were a series of letters and symbols. There was a writing made of little pictures; I do not know what that could be."

"Egyptian, very likely," I said.

"Very likely," he agreed. "I made out also several inscriptions in Greek. One was 'The Gray Maid,' meaning the sword, I think. Others were men's names or initials. There was a Latin inscription: 'The Tribune Valentius Martius won me from the Carthaginian.' And there were still more writings strange to me. Many men had owned this sword. It had personal identity like a man—or a woman. You could feel it, potent, sinister, a disturbing aliveness. 'Take

* London. † Isle of Wight. ‡ Folly Farm, near Marlborough. ‖ Silchester.

me,' it seemed to say. I reached down and detached it from the dead hand of Decius Maximus and it swung up with a lithe, balanced grace, feather-light, as much a part of me as the arm that wielded it.

" 'Blessed Saints, what a sword!' I exclaimed.

" 'It is a sign from God,' cried the centurion who had showed me the inscription.

" 'Yes, yes,' shouted the soldiers. 'The legate has a sign from God! St. Alban sends him a sword of destiny!'

"It is not my custom to rob the dead, Count Domitianus; but a voice outside myself bade me put to use what Decius Maximus had long since ceased to need. A good sword is a good sword—and it is never well to lose an opportunity to encourage your men. There was a hard campaign in front of us. The sword was a favorable omen."

"What did your priests say to it?"

He grinned.

"The holy Bishop Rufinus cleansed the steel of any heathen taint after we came to— But I am running too fast. I told the soldiers I would take the sword, and they were closing up the tomb again when there was a thudding of hoofs in the road, and a vexillation of the Batavians galloped up, escorting a centurion from the prefect of the garrison of Aquæ. He was a stout, puffy fellow and commenced shouting to me while he was dismounting.

" 'Cenric is on the Middle Road—Uaxacona * has fallen—at the gates of Viroconion —the Border is in flames!'

"He and his Batavians—of course, there wasn't a Batavian in the lot! I told him to be quiet, but the mischief was done. My legionaries went straight to their posts in the ranks, but Kyndylan and his Britons were swirling around us like wild men, yes, like the cattle the Barbarians drive with torches.

" 'We are betrayed!'

" 'Oh, our wives and children!'

" 'Back to the Border!'

"And more nonsense of the same kind.

"Kyndylan struggled through the press to where I stood beside the tomb with the gray sword in my hand. He was a handsome man, with wavy hair, ruddy gold, and eyes as blue as the summer sea, big of his body, too. He wore armor like any legionary, and because of that imagined he had done all that was necessary in order to fight as we did. I could never make him understand that without discipline and training his men were helpless before the Saxon Shield-Wall. They were brave, they had weapons! What more could they want? Armor? It was all right for some, perhaps, but his mountaineers would lose their fleetness of foot if they must carry heavy *loricæ* and helmets and the legionary's big shield.

" 'What are you going to do?' he shouted.

" 'Send on some light-horse to make certain the rascals we just cut up do not tarry hereabouts, and with the remainder of the column march back to Glevum.'

"The coolness of my voice disconcerted him, but he pointed to a group of legionaries kindling a fire.

" 'Have we time for that?'

" 'To eat?' I said. 'The men have marched for five days and some of them have fought hard this afternoon. They will be fitter for food and rest.'

" 'You will not march at once?' he shrieked.

" 'I will march in the morning.'

" 'But the Saxons are on the Border! While we wait the villages will fall to the torch.'

" 'Viroconion will hold Cenric from the back-country. We could not stop the Barbarians from burning and slaying in every place if we were camped tonight in the Middle Road. In any case, tired troops must sleep.'

"He threw up his hands in anger.

" 'It is easily seen you have no folk outside the walls! You men of the Cities are all alike. You think only of yourselves.'

" 'I think only of Britain,' I answered him. 'We shall gain nothing by wearing ourselves out. Let us take what rest we require and march as hard as we can. That way we will make better time than if we fling ourselves at the road.'

" 'My people are not under your orders,' he fumed. 'They will march with me tonight.'

"I did not argue with him. It is never worth while to argue with an angry Briton. But I was not so sure as I had been that my new sword was a sign from God or a beneficent omen as I watched Kyndylan's yelping pack huddle off on the back-track, ponies slipping their loads, chiefs shouting and gesticulating, Llywarch Hen and his brother poets chanting in the dust, and the

* Oaken Gates.

common men eating whatever they could lay their hands on.

"In the morning we followed them, and by noon their stragglers were cumbering our column. We turned northwest by the road which leads to Corinium and Glevum, and so crosses Sabrina for Magna * and the other cities in the mountains. At Corinium Kyndylan was awaiting us, blustery and self-confident. He had marched the feet off most of his men, but refused to admit he was wrong. With three thousand of the stoutest he set forth again that night by the river-path, boasting he would be in position to strike the first band of Barbarians he encountered. The local senate begged him to wait for me and the reinforcements I had sent for, but he answered them as he had me. 'You have your walls. My folk must rely upon our bodies to protect them.'

"And it was true that every unwalled house on the east bank of Sabrina was given to the torch. The forum of Corinium was surrendered to the refugees. They slept in the churches and the Basilica; and the same conditions prevailed in Glevum and Aquæ Sulis. A stream of fugitives poured west by every road and foot-path. The old men said it was the worst visitation of the heathen since Ratæ† and Lactodarum‡ and Bannaventa‖ and the other cities of the Midlands were destroyed.

"But I was very hopeful that Cenric had played into our hands. Instead of having to fight him on ground of his choosing, out of touch with our bases, as the Council of Notables had decided we should, his successful ruse to throw our strength to the south actually had placed us in position to give him battle on terms favorable to us. We had only to select the proper moment and then hurl him back into the wilderness he had traversed, with the certainty that victory would enable us to slay or capture three-fourths of his men.

"I had no doubt of the ability of my disciplined men to withstand the Saxon Shield-Wall and to destroy it if they had any assistance from the Britons. The way to meet these Barbarians when they are fighting in a large host is to involve them first with masses of light troops, and after they are completely engaged attack them with heavy infantry, and finally, send a substantial column of *cataphracti* against them. By such tactics they can be shaken apart, and they are like any troops after that happens: chopping-blocks for an intelligent enemy.

"So I turned hopeful once more. The sword helped me. The slim weight of the blade, its worn hilt so easy in the hand, its balance so deft on the wrist, inspired me with confidence. When I drew it from the sheath a current of energy surged up my arm. The gray steel glinted with a soft fire that seemed to murmur for the coolness of the blood-bath. Even the soldiers noticed it. They called it 'Mabonius's Gray Maiden,' and made up rude barrack sayings about it. And afterward they never hesitated to take the bloodiest path it carved for them. It was as if it had a heart in it, almost, a cruel and lustful heart, but yet a heart. Yes, and a keen brain. Oh, very keen!"

"Did you follow after Kyndylan?" I queried as he paused for a draught of wine.

"That was what the senators in Corinium wanted me to do.

" 'If Kyndylan runs into trouble you can support him,' they said, 'and moreover, you will be a shield between the Barbarians and the river villages.'

" 'Quite true,' I assented. 'And also, the Barbarians will be sure to hear of my coming. No, Kyndylan must shift for himself a while. Unless he is a very great fool he can not come to serious harm. I intend to attack Cenric at my pleasure, not his.' "

"You ran a certain risk in suffering your forces to be divided," I pointed out.

"Ah, but they were not *my* forces! That was the difficulty. And I was determined to come down on the Barbarians before they had any knowledge of my presence so far north. You see, Cenric would naturally expect me to have gone south in response to the lure he had set for that very purpose. Of course, he would likewise expect me to return as soon as I discovered the size of the band that had landed under Vectis; but he could not be sure when that would be.

"I had tidings at Corinium that already he had invested Viroconion, wasting all the land east and north of it toward Deva. His attention would be diverted south by the approach of Kyndylan's Britons, and my plan was to cross Sabrina and march to Viroconion by the mountain road which connects Isca Silurum with Deva. On this road I would be wholly out of reach of the invaders; they could not possibly hear of me, and when I came within striking distance I would send word to Kyndylan, arrange to

* Kenchester. † Leicester. ‡ Towcester. ‖ Norton.

have him launch his attack upon Cenric and throw in my troops the moment the Barbarians were completely involved with the Britons. As I have said, such tactics are the best to employ against the Saxons."

"Your numbers were limited, then?" I asked. "You could not procure additional troops?"

"Legionaries? No. There were a few cohorts in garrison in the Border Cities, but the Barbarians move with celerity, and there was always the chance that they might withdraw from before Viroconion. All I could do was to call for another *ala* of *cataphracti* from Isca; there were two more at Deva, but Deva covers an immense stretch of the Border, and its garrison requires a considerable force of horse to make it good. Suppose the Barbarians from the North had descended upon us when we were engaged with Cenric? That is always our nightmare, to be attacked upon two fronts. No, no, I dared not take a man from any point except Isca, and there they could spare but the one *ala*—and that meant stripping the South to the danger-point. I had to rely on what men were with me."

His face worked.

"If only Kyndylan had acted a man's part, instead of a fretful boy's!"

"Ah, he failed you?"

"I am coming to that. I marched west by way of Glevum, crossed Sabrina, headed on west to Magna, and there turned into the North Road to Deva. At Bravonium,* half-way to Viroconion, fugitives from east of the river told us of a victory Kyndylan had won in the swampy lands on that bank. He had trapped a large raiding party and killed them to a man. The Britons were mad with joy.

"'King Arthur is come again!' they shouted. 'Kyndylan is Arthur reborn!'

"One poet in the Forum was singing a genealogical song to prove that Arthur's blood ran in Kyndylan's veins. I daresay it was true."

"Who is this king?" I inquired curiously.

"The only king the Britons ever had whom you would call a soldier. While he lived he held the heathen at bay. But he did it by our—by Roman—methods. He was more Roman than Briton, at that. My father told me he won his battles with our legionaries and *cataphracti*. Anyway, the Britons in Bravonium were howling themselves hoarse in the delusion that Kyndylan was Arthur—or Arthur was Kyndylan—whichever you please. And frankly, I was worried. I knew what a hot-head Kyndylan was. Give him a taste of victory and there might be no stopping him. So I did what otherwise I should not have done. I left word for the *ala* from Isca to push after me, and marched my men on from Bravonium as fast as they could travel. They never complained, and in twelve days of foot-pounding the physicians treated three—for bellyaches!"

"A good record," I approved.

"I was proud of them. They—they—But you are a soldier. You know. I shall never command such men again. Humph! This wine is good, but it stings the throat. Humph! Well, my worst forebodings were realized. We made a night-march, but I called a halt after midnight, for the leader who enters battle with tired men is beaten before the first *pilum* is cast. We took the road again at dawn, and I sent forward the light-horse to feel the country and establish communication with Kyndylan. At the second military southwest of Viroconion a patrol intercepted us with news that Kyndylan had attacked Cenric and was stiffly engaged on the east bank of Sabrina.

"MY HEART sank, but I ordered the legionaries to accelerate their pace and galloped on myself with the *cataphracti*. As we rode out of the hills above the ford the spectacle of the battle was unfolded beneath us, the valley slopes green with trees and crops, the city a white oval in the midst of its belt of gardens, and just across the brown stream an immense swirl of men creeping closer and closer toward the South Gate. It was plain the Barbarians had the upper hand. I could trace the great wedge of Saxon shields, the tall figures of thanes and churls looming above the squat Britons. Kyndylan's folk were fighting in the disarray they seemed unable to forget, and a fringe of wounded and poltroons extended as far as the city gate, which stood open.

"A centurion of the Damnonians joined me at the ford. He said that Kyndylan had crossed the river earlier in the morning, intending to fight his way into town. That fox, Cenric, had thrust out a small body to oppose the crossing. The Saxons had been driven back, and with that their entire host had feigned panic. Of course, it was too

* Leintwardine.

much for Kyndylan's Britons. They had broken their ranks, and poured after the fleeing invaders, who had promptly reformed a Shield-Wall and faced around to annihilate the pursuit. A trick older than my sword! While I watched, the defense of the Britons disintegrated, and they fled like so many sheep for the open gate.

"St. Alban assail me if there was ever such foolishness! In the gateway a few of the garrison strove to pull the leaves together and raise the drawbridge over the moat, but the first of Kyndylan's folk to arrive chased them away. And the boiling throng eddied nearer with every slash of the Saxon swords. The Britons were so demoralized that the Saxons abandoned their formation, and the Shield-Wall split up into innumerable companies, each fighting on its own account, but all driving headlong for that open gate beyond which lay the loot of Viroconion.

"Blessed Saviour, it was disaster! Disaster such as I had anticipated for Cenric. Here were my Briton allies destroyed, and Viroconion all but taken. And if Viroconion fell like this, how should we be able to maintain the Border? Which city would fall next? I surveyed the thousands of Barbarians, looked at the few hundred horse I had available and calculated the effectives of the Sixth, tramping through the dust a mile or more in the rear. I might not even wait for the legionaries. If the city was to be saved, it must be saved immediately. Its one hope was the flexible might of my mailed horsemen.

"We trotted down to the river, and were in the ford before we were spied by a handful of loitering Saxon churls who had been plundering Kyndyan's dead. They screamed a warning, but those open gates were so close now that the main attack of the Barbarians plunged ahead until the blasts of our trumpets gave warning of the charge. Then the rearmost Saxons turned and framed a ragged Shield Wall, while midway of their mass men milled in sudden confusion, some addressing themselves toward the routed Britons, others disposed to confront us. Clean through them we drove, and the troopers of the light horse supported us with a hail of arrows that staggered them further.

"But they were warriors, those Barbarians. Cenric cried on a band to continue for the gate, and hastily rallied the rest to face us when we returned to the charge. It was not so easy the second time. They were ready for us, their dense ranks heedless of the blinding drift of arrows from our bowmen. We struck them as powerfully as before, but the head of our column crumpled up and the Saxons swarmed around us as they had around the Britons, flinging themselves at the *cataphracti* from every side, hacking with their axes, hewing with their swords, hauling troopers from the saddles with their bare hands. It was my sword put us through. Its gray blade was like a lightning-flash in the summer sky. It seemed to fight of its own accord. I swung it, guarded with it; but its sureness was uncanny, yes, more than human! Thane after thane clashed to earth under its strokes. Cenric, himself, I cut through his shoulder-plates. And so we reeled out of the enemy's ranks, leaving a tenth of our number behind us, and spurred after the Barbarians who assailed the gate.

"These fellows saw us coming, and decided to go elsewhere. Nor did I seek to stay them. I was content with our achievement and reined in my horse at the edge of the moat.

" 'Lift drawbridge, fools!' I hailed the warders. 'Close your gates! Heaven will not always be so kindly to you.'

" 'Do you come in, Legate,' they babbled. 'We are weakly-garrisoned. We—'

" 'What of Kyndylan?' I called back.

"A howl of rage answered me, and Llywarch Hen—the poet who sought to entertain you on the quay, Count Domitianus—stepped into the gateway.

" 'The shapeliest sapling of Powys has been lopped by Saxon axes,' he wailed. 'Eagles of the North have drunk the heart's-blood of him who was the pride of poets, the delight of maidens, the joy of his people, the—'

" 'Is he dead?'

" 'The choir of Saints stooped to catch his head, and the trees of the mountains soughed in unison when he—'

" 'Who commands there?' I demanded.

"A lean, hard-faced officer stepped on the battlements of the gate-tower. I knew him for a tribune of the Third Cohort of Brigantes; his name was Marcus, a capable man.

" 'Are you coming with us, Legate?' he asked. 'If not—'

" 'Bar your gates,' I returned. 'And stand prepared to unbar them if I decide to come in. All my troops are not up yet.

Also, I am not clear in my mind how best to safeguard the city.'

" 'You can safeguard it best by joining its garrison,' he replied coolly. 'I haven't five hundred trained men to hold three miles of walls. As for these—' he waved a hand down at the Britons still clustered in the gateway—'they'll do for archers, but I can't put them in a breach.'

"It was a good argument. But I couldn't commit myself while the Sixth was out of touch.

" 'Do what you can,' I told him. 'When the legion has come up I will decide. You can manage until then, can't you?'

" 'I can manage as long as I can hold the walls,' he growled.

"I had observed a cloud of dust billowing over the road across the ford, and I knew that this must be my legionaries. The Saxons had drawn off east a couple of bowshots, carrying most of their wounded with them, and were standing in a sullen ring, with shields dressed to meet an attack from any direction. Apparently they were not eager to push matters at the moment. Kyndylan's Britons had taken some toll, and my charges had been expensive. But east among the trees I saw the glimmer of steel, and south and north bodies of armed men were moving toward the slopes above the ford. There were more of the Saxons than I had expected. It was the largest host they had ever mustered against us. We were outnumbered two or three to one—and my men were weary and my horses' heads drooped.

"I thought hard. Should I risk battle in in the open? No, it was too dangerous. Should I withdraw to the west bank of the river and remain in observation? There was much to be said for this. I could menace Cenric's position at will, interfere with his plundering parties. But in the meantime what would happen in Viroconion? The Tribune Marcus had told me all he dared in so public a manner, and that was enough to warn me the people were faint-hearted. For which there was a reason. It had been accepted along the Border that when the Barbarians attacked again their blow would be directed at Aquæ Sulis, which was most exposed. The citizens of Viroconion were doubly dismayed to find that Cenric's rage struck first at them. The defeat of Kyndylan must have shaken their confidence further.

"The city's fall meant the devastation of the Border. My mission was to save it from capture. And whether rightly or wrongly, I decided I might protect it most effectively from within its walls. Perhaps I— But what do you think, Count of the Bononian Shore?"

"I do not know what to think," I admitted. "I am very glad the decision was not for me to make. Did Cenric oppose your entry?"

"Not he! And it is recollection of his willingness to permit me to reinforce the garrison that prompts my doubts. You can see how his mind worked? Outside the walls he could never be sure what I was doing. Inside, he knew where to account for me every day and all day."

"A shrewd strategy," I agreed. "It amounts to this: He was playing for all or nothing, even as you were."

"You are right," answered Mabonius. "I have thought that myself. But is it easier to look backward than forward. If only Kyndylan had— But the man is dead, and he could never have been other than he was. It was God's providence, as Bishop Rufinius said when he blessed my sword, lest there be some deviltry connected with it—that was after it had become famous through the city. Yes, God's providence. God's providence that the heathen should possess Britain. But why?"

"I have never found priest to answer me similar questions, my friend," I said.

"There are some things beyond priestly wisdom," he remarked shrewdly. "The Bishop said it was a blessing on the city when the Sixth marched in through the South Gate, baggage and gear, under cover of my *cataphracti* and some *tormentæ* Marcus erected on the neighboring curtains. But I can not see the blessing for any one of us concerned therein."

I refilled the wine-cups.

"You strain my curiosity unbearably, man from another world," I urged. "What happened to your city after you entered?"

"NOTHING for several days," he replied. "I had sent away the *alæ* of light horse with instructions to join the *cataphracti* from Isca, and finally, a week after I entered Viroconion I concerted an enterprise with these troops across the river by means of which we introduced a small train of provisions. And it was good that

we did. In another week Cenric had secured additional men, determined his own plans and sealed us effectively within the walls. The days were not far off when we should have to kill the horses of the *cataphracti* for food."

"But this magic sword?"

"Ah, but was it magic? That is another question I have never had answered. Sometimes I thought it was. And Cenric did. Surely, it was the most potent defense we had. You see, toward the end of that second week the Barbarians began to attack the walls, not blindly and stupidly, so that we could shoot them down with arrows or crush them by ranks with the catapults, but quick, hard-thrust surprize assaults, two or three at once at widely separated spots. They had no siege-engines, but they rigged rams and worked them very ably, with hurdles protected by green hides to shelter their men. And after another week or so they began night-attacks, which were the most trying of all. We could never tell at which point in a circuit of three miles their ladders would be heard scraping under the battlements, and in consequence we were obliged to keep our men on the walls in full shifts at night as well as by day.

"In the third week, too, they found a weak place in the east wall and set to pounding a breach. The wall was old, and once the rubble core crumbled we were helpless to stay their ravages. All I could do was to build an inner rampart of leveled houses. They made their first assault on the fourth night after the breach was started, and we lost five hundred men between midnight and dawn. Once they were over the inner rampart. And the following afternoon they opened an attack at the South Gate. By dusk they had bridged the moat and burst in the gate and again we stayed them by erection of a makeshift parapet of earth and building-stones.

"From that night on we never knew an hour's peace. Cenric sent to all the Barbarians in Britain, the Jutes and the Angles, who hold the East Coast north of the Saxon territories, and the remnants of the Picts in the far North.

" 'This is the time to bury our own quarrels,' he said. 'Help me to take Viroconion, and the Britons' lands will be bare to us. Here is more loot than we have won since our fathers' time.'

"They flocked to him, all save the Picts, who helped him by a diversion such as I had dreaded when I forbore to call for the *cataphracti* at Deva, drenching the Northern Border in a whirlwind of blood and fire. The Angles and Jutes, however, marched to Viroconion, and in the fourth week of the siege they battered a second breach in the west wall next the river.

"There was rivalry betwixt them and the Saxons as there was betwixt my men and the Britons, yes, and betwixt the citizens and the garrison. Several senators wanted to ask Cenric for terms. All they thought of was saving their fat necks. One I hanged in his toga, and that shut the mouths of the rest. We also had a number of frays, in which men were slain. And I could never depend on the Britons. Oh, they were brave enough, but unstable! One day they would fight like legionaries; and then they would become as frightened as children who have seen a spirit in the dark.

"But my real trouble was with the citizens. You would think that because of their families they would fight more desperately than any of us. But not at all. The town life had softened them, and they were too accustomed to leaving all military duty to the soldiers. With the Barbarians, on the other hand, whatever their differences might be, they all forgot their animosities the instant the war-horns blew. Among them, as you doubtless know, every man is a soldier; his first wealth goes into his arms and armor. It is their pride to be well equipped, as it is their pleasure to fight, and he among them who dies in battle is assured of salvation.

"When our provisions ran short and we had to eat horse-meat there were loud protests because I favored the fighting-men in distributing the rations. I said the strength of the fighting-men must come first, it was all that stood between the women and children and slavery or death. But the citizens charged me with cruelty and a policy of starvation. It was Bishop Rufinius who quelled them. He was a fussy old man I had never had much use for, but he developed new qualities in the siege. The night toward the end of the fifth week when the Barbarians burst simultaneously through the South Gate and the west breach, Rufinius marched in the midst of my *cataphracti* to stem the assault, miter on head and crozier in hand.

" 'Christ with us, my sons,' he said.

"He died in the breach, a Saxon arrow in his eye.

"The Tribune Marcus led the reserves we dispatched to regain the South Gate, and he succeeded after very severe fighting—we had to pay a life for every two we took. I had expelled the Jutes and Angles from the west wall and stood leaning on Gray Maiden, listening to a report by one of his officers when a tumult broke out behind us and Llywarch Hen ran from an alley to say the Saxons had forced the east breach. I mustered my dismounted *cataphracti* and a cohort of legionaries, and we tramped wearily across the city. St. Alban, how tired we were! In the Via Triumphalis, which runs from the South Gate to the forum, Marcus encountered me.

" 'You know the Britons have yielded the east breach?' he asked. 'By St. Paul, Legate, we are at the end of our tether. There is a fresh attack forming against the South Gate.'

"As he spoke, the howling of the Jutes and Angles rose again at the foot of the west breach, and I heard our trumpets calling up the legionaries, whom I had left prostrate among the dead snatching the sleep that was as welcome to them as wine.

"Once more I knew the worst. We could no longer maintain the circuit of the walls.

" 'Henceforth we fight from house to house,' I said. 'Pass the word to all your officers. The forum shall be our citadel.'

" 'And the citizens?'

"What could I answer him?

" 'We have done all we can for them. Now they must care for themselves. Our task is to hold the city so long as we can lift our swords.'

"He nodded grimly.

" 'That is common sense, Legate,' he agreed. 'If all must die, does it matter that some shall die sooner than others?'

"He sped off, and for a breath I would have recalled him. Who was I to pass sentence on the feeble thousands whose wan faces showed in every door and window? But then I chanced to look down at my sword, its gray glint burning hungrily through the red drops that trickled from hilt to point. It seemed to flash a message back to me: 'Fight! Fight on!' And I remembered that I was not a man, but the custodian of a cause. Yet the shrieks of the women appal my ears as I sit here.

"Heavenly Father, those were bloody days! Have you ever defended a city from house to house, from street to street? Ha, you do not know war! The ruddy sweep of the flames, the hoarse barking of the death-grapple, the sobs of the wounded, the thunder of falling walls, smoke of fire and dust of combat clouding the sun, so that at noon the streets are shadowed.

"Both sides were obsessed by the passion of conflict. For us it was the last stand to keep the Border inviolate. Viroconion became more than a city, more than the scene of our agony. It was Britain—Rome! All that Rome ever meant in that outermost province of the Empire. To the Barbarians the struggle was the final test of their prowess. They ceased to reckon the slaughter in overcoming our defense. Valorous always, they were now spendthrift of life. Any little spot that we clung to was essential to them, no matter what it cost. What if as many died as lived? The plundered countryside provided meat and wine for the living. They had hordes of women which we plucked from the ruins and sold day by day at the highest price we could wring from ready spenders.

"Back, we were driven, back, back. We fought hungry; we fought thirsty; we fought in our sleep. We slew until our arms hung limp, but however exhausted I was, the sword Gray Maiden never failed me. I should have died a score of times but for the strange power which seemed to render it invincible. Again and again I was beaten down, isolated, trapped in a circle of heathen, my helmet knocked off, my shield in splinters—and the sword would find me a path of escape.

" 'Follow the Gray Maid!' the legionaries would cry. 'Up, Victrix! The legate's Maid is lustful again!'

"By the tenth day after the Barbarians passed the walls we were hemmed in the block of buildings surrounding the forum, a scant cohort of the legionaries, a troop or so of the *cataphracti* and a handful of Britons and townsfolk. We barricaded the street entrances with stones and pillars from the arcades, uniting the senate house, the Basilica, the Church of St. Alban and the Baths into one massive fortress. But we lacked the men to make our resistance effective. Cenric battered a way through the rear wall of St. Alban's, and we retired into the Baths and the Basilica. Marcus and a score or so of the citizens maintained themselves in the senate house for two days more.

"We in the Baths and the Basilica were almost impregnable. The two structures were built in Trajan's time, as solidly as this Prætorium, forming a right angle around two sides of the Forum. Water we had in plenty, but food was limited to a small quantity of grain in the cellars of the Basilica, all that remained of the public stores. Our principal defect was that every time we were attacked, despite our strong walls, we must lose men. And men we could not afford to lose.

"The Barbarians refused to be discouraged. They tried every device that ingenuity could suggest. Day after day they hurled themselves at us, three times forcing an entrance into the double doorway of the Basilica which led to the Law Courts, as eager the third time as the second, although every man who crossed the threshold perished. They brought up a catapult from the walls and endeavored to work it against the Baths, thinking to make a breach; but they had no experience with *tormentæ* and did us little harm. They tried to burn or smoke us out, heaping our walls with fagots, and under cover of the smoke Cenric headed a fourth attempt on the Basilica. I slashed him in the thigh and should have slain him when he fell if two of his thanes had not offered their bodies to protect him while others drew him clear of the ruck. They lowered men to the roof of the Baths from the porch of St. Alban's, thinking to fight their way down to the street floor; but we accounted for every one who attempted the venture.

"IT WAS the next day that Cenric limped into the midst of the Forum, a thane bearing a peace-shield in front of him.

" 'I will speak with the Briton who wields the gray sword,' he called.

"These Barbarians have no cognizance of Rome, Count Domitianus. To them all who dwell in Britain are Britons. So I set him right.

" 'I am the Legate Mabonius,' I answered, climbing on to the barricade in the doorway of the Basilica. 'I command the Romans in Viroconion. Who are you who assault the Roman power?'

" 'I am Cenric, King of the West Saxons,' he said, grinning. 'And Roman or Briton, you will not be able to withstand me much longer.'

" 'You have not succeeded very well against us this far,' I said.

" 'Why, that is true,' he admitted candidly. 'We have taken the city, and I suppose we shall kill you if we can not come to terms; but I would never have climbed the walls had I known how many of my people should pass to Woden's halls. You are a good servant of your gods. It is a rich sacrifice you have offered them.'

" 'I do not sacrifice to my God, but to my country.'

" 'It is all one,' he returned impatiently. 'Will you talk terms?'

" 'What terms?' I parried.

" 'Join me, and fight for me, and I will adopt you for my son,' he proffered.

" 'Do I look like a man who would sell himself to his people's enemies?' I demanded.

"He looked abashed.

" 'I am a plain-spoken man,' he apologized, 'and I say what is in my mind. I have thought often in the last month that I would be proud to call you son, though my blood is not your blood. You are the only man who can say that he has struck down Cenric twice—and lived.'

" 'There are a few more of us who still live,' I answered.

" 'You have made a brave fight,' he said, 'but I am willing to offer Woden another ten-score warriors, if I must.'

" 'We do not sell cheap,' I taunted him.

" 'You do not. You are the best man I have ever crossed blades with. I have not taken one of you alive.'

" 'And you shall not!'

" 'I am content,' he retorted, 'if you will pay me a price, to let you go free.'

"Now, this was an idea which had never occurred to me. I wondered whether he would require some act of treachery from me.

" 'That must depend upon what price you ask,' I replied.

" 'I will give you, and all who still live with you, your freedom if you will give me your gray sword,' he said.

" 'It is a Roman's sword,' I objected. 'It has been blessed by our priests. What service could it render you?'

" 'A good sword will always serve a master who does not stint its thirst,' he answered. 'And I will chance the blessings of your priests. If the old one who died in the west breach had any part in it, Woden could ask no fitter sponsor for a blade.'

" 'But what do you mean by freedom?' I asked, bewildered.

" 'I mean what I say.' He tugged savagely at his long yellow mustaches. 'You may be my enemy, but say—did you ever know a man of any race who could prove that Cenric the West Saxon had flouted his own word?'

"That was the truth, Count of the Bononian Shore. This Cenric was a man of his word. And his suggestion inspired me with the plan which brought me hither.

" 'Will you supply me and my men with a ship and grant us safe conduct oversea to Gaul?' I challenged him.

"He was plainly puzzled.

" 'So you will not join your brethren—over there?'

"He waved a hand westward.

" 'I will give you the gray sword only on the terms I have named,' I said curtly. 'A sizable ship and safe-conduct to Gaul.'

" 'You are not quite the man I deemed you to be,' he growled. 'I expected to meet you some day again—when I carried the gray sword. But you shall have your way. I, myself, will go with you to the sea, and give you one of my own longships. It is a steep price to pay for a sword, but I pay it gladly, for I have seen what the sword can do. And if it can do so much in the hands of a Briton or Roman or whatever you choose to call yourself, what will it do when a Saxon stirs the red broth with it?' "

Mabonius fell silent a moment, my Anicius, and I— But it is needless for me to describe my feelings.

"That is my story," he added presently, and sighed. "If it has wearied you, I apologize. Has it suggested aught that we can do for Britain's plight?"

I stood up before him.

"There is only one thing I can do for Britain," I said, "and that is to fight for her."

"Yourself?" he questioned eagerly. "Do you think many—"

"O, man from another world," I exclaimed, "how shall I make you comprehend that the world you expected to find here is no more, is dead? Here nobody cares for Britain. Frank and Goth are concerned with their own conquests. The Romans left are degenerates and fractious as your British princes."

"But you—"

"Yes, I will fight for Britain, because I should like to sample the air of the island that could breed a Roman like you, Mabonius."

He was silent again for a while. Then he also rose.

"The dusk approaches," he said. "I must put forth."

"But whither? So soon? Tarry and—"

He smiled the wry smile I had noticed when he first landed.

"I must not disappoint Cenric," he replied. "And I must make belated report to the Council of Notables who sent me to fight the Saxons. They will wonder what has become of me. I had thought to return at the head of a Roman army. Well, at least, I shall be able to tell them how the Sixth was shattered in Viroconion."

"I can not go with you at such short notice," I protested. "I have responsibilities to fulfil."

"You must not leave them," he returned. "It warmed my heart when you offered to go with me, Count Domitianus. It proved to me, despite what you say, that the Roman spirit still smolders outside of Britain's tiny Roman corner. But I would have you remember that we who labor to carry on the tradition of Rome must each bend his back to the particular task God's providence has entrusted to him. You, I doubt not, implant some measure of discipline and courtesy in the administration of the Barbarians in Gaul. I, perhaps, accomplish an inscrutable purpose in striving to preserve our British heritage."

"We labor in vain!" I cried, my voice ringing with anger.

His face twisted in that smile without mirth.

"Who shall say what is vain?" he asked softly. "Often I have known discouragement. Many times it has seemed impossible to reconcile the evils of life with an All-wise Divinity. You have heard me chafe at the failures of my own people and their allies. But as I look back now, as I adjust myself to the disappointment of all my hopes, I *know* that there is a reason for what we do and suffer. If Rome must die shall she leave no legacy behind her to enrich the earth?"

"She is dead!" I insisted.

"Then let us spread her legacy as broadcast as we may." His armor rattled in the movements of the salute. "*Ave, Cæsar! Morituri te salutamus!*"

And so he went. An hour later from the quay I saw his galley dwindling in the west.

OH, MY Anicius, tell me, you who are so much wiser, so much better in word and thought and deed than I, tell me: In very truth, have all our Roman centuries been in vain? Must the gathering night of barbarism obscure forever the learning and culture of the ages? What has Christianity done for us that the old gods did not do? Would Christ, if He were here, approve what Clovis and Theodoric do in His name?

Does the world drift or is it spinning toward a definite goal? Is this Rome's end—or is there an hereafter?

Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!

ANNOUNCEMENT:

THE next issue of Adventure *will be the January 1st issue and will appear on that date. After that* Adventure *will be issued on the first and fifteenth of each month on the exact date that appears on the cover. It will save confusion if readers will make note of the publication date of the first January number.*

Looking About

IT IS a pity. In behalf of all of us here in the office I want just to blurt out frankly how much we appreciate the congratulations, even yet pouring in, on the "new" *Adventure*. But if I do, I know, being an American myself, just how the average American will react to it— "Hot air! A none-too-clever little way of getting in some puffs for his magazine."

So I'm not doing it. I'm just saying a formal thank you instead. But I'm saying this— It wasn't the congratulations and approvals themselves that did most to make us glow. It was the downright friendly, intimate, "we're glad, too" feeling back of them.

One thing more, letting it sound however it may—and it won't be our old readers who raise any cry of "hot air." Many a one of them has said it or written it to me himself. The reader-feeling that has grown up around *Adventure* is a thing unique and amazing. Camp-Fire has somehow brought us all very close together in a widespread good-fellowship that has no parallel in the magazine field, or in any other field for that matter. I've served on six other magazines myself and had fairly intimate knowledge of quite a few more, besides knowing the general field fairly well from having spent most of my life in it. Certainly I have never seen the like. Nor have I yet found any one in the magazine field who challenges this characteristic of *Adventure*. It is just a commonly accepted fact.

And it is this renewed evidence of that fact that makes us glow the most.

Adventure long since ceased to be a mere fiction magazine. It has become a kind of institution. Not just because of the practical services rendered through its departments, but chiefly because of this unique personal friendliness for it that has grown up among its readers. Friendliness for it and *among themselves*. Perhaps that last is the most remarkable part of it all. Today I was talking with the manager of another magazine, one carrying no fiction and having not even a remote connection with our house. He was saying just what I've finished saying. And he said that the other day he was reading *Adventure* in a chair-car when a gray-haired stranger passing through the car saw the magazine in his hands, stopped, dropped his arm around the back of the chair and, as a fellow reader, chatted with him about our magazine. Afterward the porter asked my friend whether he knew who it was that had stopped to chat with him. He didn't and the porter told him—the president of one of our largest universities, known throughout the land for more than academic activities and standing. It was good hearing, of course, that he read our magazine at all, but the fact that it made him stop to chat with a man he'd never seen before was far better hearing.

And to put alongside that incident, do you older readers remember the hunted, nearly broken tramp in Lower California who in his extremity came secretly and in fear of his life to George E. Holt, of "A. A." and our writers' brigade, because he "knew Holt was connected with *Adventure* and *Adventure* stood for fair play"?

It's a strange fellowship, truly. One for us all to be proud of.

And these recent expressions of it—believe me, we in the office are going to do our darnedest to deserve our place in that fellowship.

Maybe I've talked too much, but I mean every word of it.

THE State supports the schools but the schools do not teach the pupils to support the State.

ONE of a child's most pronounced traits is curiosity, yet the average child hates school and schools are supposed to exist to satisfy curiosity. Why is that?

On graduation from college one has spent sixteen years in school. The average person has to spend the first years after graduation in painfully adjusting himself to life. Yet school and college are supposed to fit one for life. Why is that?

A. S. H.

A free-to-all Meeting-Place

The Camp

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit *of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.*

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts

LADIES and gun-duels, hermit thrushes, a knock, old buckskin patches for a new sweater, trapped animals and fur coats, the spring shoulder holster. It sounds mixed up, but it isn't:

Haverstraw, New York

I bought a new sweater a couple of days ago and this afternoon came the October 23rd *Adventure*. In time the new sweater will doubtless be as dear to my heart as the old one is now. The old one has patches of buckskin on the elbows, and in time these will be fondly sewed on the elbows of the new sweater—but do you honestly mean that there will be no more pictures on the cover of *Adventure*? Who has high-hatted you into this degree of alleged respectability? Does Arthur Friel wear a dress suit up the Amazon?

TWO things in "Camp-Fire" interest me particularly this issue. Mr. Rogers on trapping might as well be a wet talking to a dry if he directs his remarks at the anti-trappers. I happen to know some of them. Your own comments on the attention of the ladies indicate a woful lack of observation on your part. The lady would much rather listen to a highly sentimental account of the poor little animal's suffering, over which she can shiver—and snuggle down in her furs to get warmed up again. Try it out for yourself.

MAYBE I can contribute a little on the spring holster matter. In 1912 and 1913 I had with me on a construction job in Chihuahua a man who rather typified the old-timer of the Southwest—with none of the popular bunk attached. He was a native of New Mexico, served as a deputy sheriff for his father when a mere boy, during the "New Mexican Cattle Wars." He knew Billy the Kid and was friends with Pat Garrett. Ordinarily he was the kindliest of men. Roused, he was a level-headed, ruthless terror. It was not at all difficult to beat him "target shooting" with a pistol. When it came to speed with the merely essential amount of accuracy he made one feel utterly and hopelessly foolish. He handled a Colt like a kid throwing stones. I think he was forty-three years old in 1912

for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Fire

and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

and he was eighteen at the time of what comes next which would put his spring-holster in about the year 1887.

HE HAD been fleeced by a couple of professional gamblers—a couple of times—and had spent considerable thought on the matter. These men were fast gunmen and any one who accused them of cheating had to get the drop on them first—somehow. The idea of the spring shoulder holster came to him and he experimented with it. "I had to make me a spring that would give the easiest jerk and still be stiff enough not to drop my gun if my horse started any time to pitch." A pay-day came while he was still experimenting and he lost another month's wages to the gamblers. Finally he rode in to town with two guns on his belt "in plain sight" and a third in the new rig, under his vest. With the third gun he got the drop on the two gamblers, proved his case to the satisfaction of the crowd and the gamblers were run out of town. "If I had gone for my belt guns they would have beat me to it—sure. They were *bad*."

This chap made me such a holster and I remember that he reshaped and tempered the spring five or six times before he got it just right. He was most emphatic about leaving the spring "naked" because any sort of cover on the steel would "hang you up." Scratches on the gun were of small moment compared to a clean, sure release.

MOST of what I learned of this man—as regards his youth and the years before I knew him—I got from his wife and his friends of whom there were several on the job. Then by degrees I got confirmation with occasional further details out of him. Like most men of his breed he cared little to talk about himself. Occasionally I worked on him through my five-year-old daughter whom he quite worshiped—he would open up for her pretty well, especially during riding lessons. I give you the foregoing for what it may be worth with all possible assurance that I believe it myself. I have seen only one rig that I think is faster than the spring shoulder holster and it belonged to a little bit of a man who came from Colorado. He was a marked example of the saying that it took Mr. Colt to make men equal —or better. I have often wished I could see a trial

of speed between my border friend and the Colorado exponent, but of course this didn't happen and never will.

If you choose to print any of this you are quite welcome but I hesitate to include the name of my border friend because he might resent the liberty on my part. You, personally are quite welcome to know that he was —— —— and the last I heard of him he was in the Immigration Service. If General Funston had lived to command our invasion of Mexico, shortly after his death, Perkins would have been his chief scout. He was one of two men I have known who never, so far as I could see, felt fear—but it did not make him reckless.—S. H. HULSE.

P. S.—I most forgot to tell you—I was up in the Inter-State Park Tuesday night—you remember the moonlight—and a couple of bucks got to fighting near by and the racket stirred up a hermit thrush who sang for several minutes. If you have ever heard this song by moonlight you will need no attempted descriptions from me. If you haven't, see what Mr. Burroughs has to say about it. I had never heard it before and don't care much if I never do again—things like that *might* lose by repetition but could never be enhanced.—S. H. H.

IT MIGHT be said that this reader of *Adventure* had an adventure of his own. Some of us armchair adventurers fall into the habit of thinking of adventure as something in another world, by no means the kind of thing to happen to us. Cut throats and eleventh-hour rescues seem to belong to fiction only. The following isn't fiction:

Fort Myers, Florida.

CAMP-FIRE: Anent the out-of-the-way places where *Adventure* may be found, and the places where it is most eagerly sought:

I spent a couple of years between Tepic and Ixtlan (States of Jalisco and Tepic, Mexico) being employed by the Utah Construction Company in various capacities and spending all of my time in camp.

Before leaving Nogales, Ariz., I arranged with the newsdealer to forward current magazines to me. *Adventure* came regularly, except for the few revolutionary periods. The engineering force of the Southern Pacific Railroad (building the extension from Tepic to Guadalajara) soon found out that I was receiving *Adventure* and soon runners came over the hills from the many camps, all bearing notes, and the sole request was for "any old copies of *Adventure* that you might have lying around."

One of these engineers, Mr. H. C. Knight, a Texan by the way, a devotee of *Adventure* (in fact he might have been called an addict), was captured by bandits near Aguacatlan and, in company with a young Mexican rancher and the latter's sweetheart, was tied to a tree. Ransom was demanded and, to emphasize the demand, the throats of the two Mexicans were cut. Mr. Knight had this sight to endure nearly the entire day, but was finally rescued.

I really felt that he must have felt, and still does feel, his own situation reflected in many of the stories in *Adventure*.—G. S. WYMAN.

A WORD from Arthur D. Howden Smith concerning his "Gray Maiden" story in this issue:

Babylon, Long Island.

Historically, it's unusually well-documented, and I believe my deductions as to the process of the downfall of Roman Britain are wholly justified. I might be criticized for claiming so complete a break in communications between the island and Gaul, but here I base my stand on the entire lack of contemporary notice of Britain in all Continental records. Excavations at Viroconion, by the way, have proved that the city was plundered and burned.—A. D. H. S.

SOME time ago at Camp-Fire one of you questioned the way Walter J. Coburn handled the psychology of some of his characters during a gun-fight. If I remember correctly, Mr. Coburn's defense has already been made. Anyhow, the incident called forth a letter from an old-timer of the West and we forwarded it to Mr. Coburn. Here are the letter and the reply—and once more Camp-Fire has been the means of two acquaintances getting into touch again after many years.

Portland, Oregon.

If the writer Walter J. Coburn at one time lived at Great Falls, Mont., I know him as I lived in that part of the country and have read a good deal of his writing and having lived and roamed around over the West for forty years. Have seen a good deal of gun-play but fail to see where there is anything unreasonable in "Freeze Out." I enjoy stories of the West, as I have been in most of the places from the Canadian line to Mexico and I know a good many of the localities that W. J. Coburn, W. C. Tuttle and B. M. Bowers write about. Lived for a while near the Flying N. I have freighted, punched cows and broken broncos. I know the Wild Bunch of Wyoming, was in the Johnson Co. trouble, was well acquainted with Doc Middleton. I was in Deadwood before any railroads were in there and was in the Western Black Hills when the B. & M. was building through. So if your correspondent from Vancouver, B. C., had seen a little part of what I have he would not think "Freeze Out" unreasonable.—L. G. PIERCE.

Mr. Coburn's letter:

Ojai, California.

Many thanks for yours of Aug. 23rd. Appreciate it a lot and it also puts me in touch with a man I'd lost track of since I quit my home range and drifted yonderly to this country of climate, real estate booms and Iowans.

Have had other letters regarding "Freeze Out" and, with the one exception of the Vancouver comrade, they were more than gratifying in their praise of the yarn.

In the Little Rockies of Montana, an hour's ride from our home ranch where I lived some twenty-five years, lived some of the fastest gunmen that ever rode the Outlaw Trail. Kid Curry, Butch Cassidy, Big Nose George, Henry Longabaugh, and more. Long Henry, old Jack Teal, peace officer, and many more. And it so happened that I'd come in contact with plenty many men who packed guns and savvied when and when not to go for 'em. For some few years I packed a gun, myself. We all did. And I've been in a few tights myself. So, despite the fact that this comrade up in Vancouver takes exception to the way I make a man act in a "tight," I come —— near knowing my stuff.

If the gods are kind, I'll be squatting alongside an Arizona camp-fire soon, arguing with an old-timer that's all the same daddy to me. He's a man who knew the Wild Bunch far better than any other living man today. One evening, some years ago, this same big, soft-spoken Texan, without drawing a gun, stood off as tough a dozen men as you could hand-pick and shove into a barroom. Also he was once the partner of Kid Curry in the cow business. He was in Landusky the evening when the Kid killed his first man, old Pike Landusky. He is the only man that ever made the notorious "Jew Jake" "lay 'em down."

Old Jim would sure get a big laugh out of it if I told him that some Vancouver pilgrim claimed I was ignorant when it came to knowing how men act under the round hole of a .45 barrel. He saw me grow up in that country when she was a sure-enough cow-country; when we gathered, in one morning's drive on a round-up, a herd you couldn't shoot across; when gambling was wide open and a man was judged by the badness of the horse he could ride, the amount of red liquor he could stand up under, and the way he acted in a scrap.

My horns are sawed now and there are a few incidents of the old days that I'm plumb willing to forget. A kid in a country like that is apt to do a lot of darn-fool things. Like other kids whose dads owned big outfits up there, I ran pretty wild: Looking back, I wonder why some man didn't kill me. I'm not proud of those scrapes I horned into. Not a darn bit proud. But I learned a lot that comes in handy now that I've quit punching cows and am punching this typewriter.

If a man like Pierce who has known the Wild Bunch and was in the Johnson Country war likes my stuff, I figure I haven't taken any liberties with my country and my people.

I wrote the Vancouver man in care of *Adventure*, taking up the points he howled about, so I don't reckon I need to elaborate further on 'em.

Many thanks for sending me Pierce's letter which I'm returning herewith.—WALT COBURN.

P. S.—Will write Pierce a line or two and let him know I'm the same Walt Coburn he used to know up home.—W. J. C.

The next issue of Adventure, that of January 1, will be out on January 1. Thereafter issues will appear on the first and fifteenth of each month. The date printed on the cover of each issue will be the date on which it appears.

HERE'S word from one of our wandering comrades. He'll find quite a few of us ready to join him in his "hard-boiled optimist" verdict.

San Francisco.

Enclosed please find two bits for which kindly forward to me one Camp-Fire button, as I am quite helpless without one. Since my brother lost the one I had, I feel like a half dressed hombre.

Enclosed also find one clipping which I cut out of today's San Francisco *Examiner*.

PARTNER, ruby mine—Are you a he-man around 30? Have you guts to kill or be killed; to stick a camel 1,000 miles over deserts to make a quarter million in two years? If you have these requirements and $6,000, write box 2056.

What do my comrades at the Camp-Fire think about this guy? $6,000—cash, 1,000 miles of deserts to kill and get killed, for ¼ million in two years. Some hardboiled optimist, I say. But me for the Amazon.

By the way, these recent inquiries in "A A" about S. A. (Peru, Ecuador, etc.) have caused quite a stampede in the San Francisco Library on South American books. I just returned from China, P. I., D. E. India (June, 1924-June, 1926) and wanted to read up some accounts of S. A. but that's where I had another "think" coming. Out of 50 books on this subject there wasn't a one in. Oh, I've got some by this time, but they are either old 1759 up to 1895 or written by would-be explorers and full of lies and contradictions. One will say the Jivaros are "good Indians," the next one prints "they are hostile," etc. Well, I'll know for sure which is which after I've been there. It will, however, take us quite a few more months to start, because we haven't saved up enough "kale" as yet.

While I am at it (pestering you with this "rag") will you please direct the office boy to change Address on Identification card No. 13,860 as follows ——

Many thanks in advance. Good luck and health to the office force, and the elevator man. Cheero.—JEAN MACELLRICH.

TWO more comrades take part in our manila-hemp discussion. First, here is Captain Dingle of our writers' brigade and "Ask Adventure":

Schooner *Gauntlet*,
Stamford, Connecticut.

DEAR CAMP-FIRE: May I horn in with a few words regarding Mr. Cruickshank's criticism of John Webb's manila-hemp item, and Mr. Webb's answer? I'm not replying to either in particular, or taking sides, but simply making remarks because I happened to manage a rope-walk once, and furthermore because I am a little bit impatient of sea writers who assert that certain styles of speech establish or wreck a man's claim to seamanship.

Encyclopedias and seamanship text-books over the lee bow, manila *is* called hemp at sea, often. Hemp usually refers to Russian hemp, which is

green when untarred; but there is Italian hemp, and Godavery hemp, and Sunn hemp, and half a dozen other classes. Manila is called hemp by rope-makers, too, in numberless instances. It would not establish a man as a landsman and no sailor to use the term manila hemp, any more than it would do so for him to say that fore and main topsail halyards both lead down to port. It is usual to say (when a fiction writer is making a fiction bucko mate catechise a prospective A. B.) that the fore topsail halyards lead down to port, the main to starboard, and so forth; but in whalers the main topsail halyards led down to port too, on account of the gangway and cutting-in gear.

It was in my own experience, in the old *Thermopylæ*, that the Old Man used these actual words: "Can you not put that other sail up, Mister Douglas?" Of course, fictionally, he ought to have bawled: "Give her that main-to'-gallant s'l, Mister, and hump yerself!" and perhaps Mr. Webb, and the late Morgan Robertson, would say that the skipper of the *Thermopylæ* was no sailor but a landsman.

My notion is that the stickler for precision in sea terminology is far more likely to be the aspiring novice than the seaman. Cheer oh!—DINGLE.

And now a letter from the son of an old Cape Horner:

Miami, Florida.

Let's settle the discussion in the September 23rd issue regarding manila hemp, etc. I'm an ex-licensed officer, my dad's a deep-water *sailor* and his father was before him, both skippers before they were twenty-one.

Now Cruickshank and Webb are both part wrong and part right. Hemp is grown in Cental America (Sisal), and in New Zealand (Phormiam), and in the East Indies (Sunn). There is also a manila-hemp rope. Cruickshank is right about manila hemp being bought, sold and billed as such, for who should know more of a product than those who make and market it? This information not only comes from my father's teaching but also from the Encyclopedia Britannica, Page 713, Par. 2. And believe me, Mr. Webb, my dad is no steamboat hand. He's a Cape Horner many times over and an Indian Ocean man of no mean experience—FLOYD F. KERR.

HIS first story came to us signed "Jack Rendel." To later stories he signed his name more in full. In Lewis J. Rendel, then, whose story, "The Place of Birds," appears in this issue, you are merely meeting an old friend.

Incidentally, very, very few pen-names appear in our magazine. There are occasionally excellent and entirely creditable reasons for using a pen-name, but in general such use is contrary to the frank, open spirit of Camp-Fire. Without checking up, I'd say that only about two per cent. of our magazine's authors write for it under any but their own names.

A BIT from a letter that fate has kept in our cache longer than we should like. Concerning our old friends the Jibaros or Jivaros.

Museum of the American Indian, New York.

Last winter we had some correspondence in the course of which I suggested eastern Eucador, home of the head-hunting Jibaro Indians as a place where exploration is needed and interesting adventures might be expected. I have recently received however from Washington, Bulletin 79 of the American Bureau of Ethnology which I fear rather "skims the cream" of the region in question. It is entitled "Blood Revenge, War, and Victory Feasts among the Jibaro Indians of Eastern Ecuador," and the author is Rafael Karsten. It contains among other things the best account I have seen of the process by which the heads of slain enemies are shrunk to the size of an orange to keep as charms and trophies.—M. R. HARRINGTON.

EVERY old reader knows that reading one of Hugh Pendexter's stories is like reading living, breathing history with all the dull part left out—a moving, talking picture of the early days of our country. As to reliability of the historical material used, well, in the following he thanks readers for pointing out slips, but the number of criticisms that pass through this office are very close to zero. Trying to catch Hugh Pendexter is a regularly recognized Camp-Fire sport and every one with sufficient grounding in historical knowledge is invited to take part. But you'd better be sure before you go ahead.

Catching any author in a slip of any kind is a recognized Camp-Fire sport, for that matter. And it is the chief factor in securing reliability of fact material used in our stories. Editors and "Ask Adventure" experts are equally watched and pounced upon for mistakes of any kind. Which is as we would have it.

But I ask a special favor—Do not pounce upon us for the very poor and hurried proof-reading that has recently marred our magazine. Believe me, we are very keenly aware of it and very sick over it. It has been unbelievably bad and there is no excuse except that for the past half-year or more we've been going through the changes and upheavals incident to change of ownership and are only beginning to settle down into a normal routine. Added to this strain there has been the driving pressure of tremendous enthusiasm for the "new" magazine and its crowding possibilities. We voluntarily overworked

month after month until we were all pretty close to being wrecked. And our work suffered therefrom.

The above is an explanation and an apology. It is not an excuse and is not meant for one. But things are now settling down to a normal basis. I have no intention of covering the past with promises for the future, but we know what good proofreading is and our aim is to make our magazine the best possible at every point.

Now let's turn back to the more cheerful subject of Hugh Pendexter:

Norway, Maine.

I am asked so frequently by readers for a list of source-material that I will anticipate such requests with a list of the books most helpful to me in building "The Fighting Years."

Parkman's "Montcalm and Wolfe," vol. 2; chapter 22; "Narrative and Critical History of America," vol. 5, edited by Winsor; Post's Journals, vol. I, Early Western Travels; Watson's "Annals of Philadelphia," two vols.; Sherman Day's "Historical Collections of Pennsylvania;" Dunbar, "History of Travel," vols. 1 and 2; Lossing's "Field Book of the Revolution," vol. 2; Documents Relating to Col. Hist. of N. Y., p. 223, of General Index under "Forbes;" many volumes of "Early Western Travel" for topography and nature notes; Hammond's "Historical Forts of N. America;" Christopher Gist's "Journals;" Severance's "An Old Frontier of France," vol. 2; Historical Act. of Bouquet's Exped. *vs.* Ohio Indians, in '64 for maps; Butterfield's "History of the Girty's" pp. 15-16; Shirley's Letters, vol. 2; Blair's "Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi and Great Lakes," vol. 2; Winsor's "Mississippi Valley;" Halsey's "Four Great Rivers;" Bureau Am. Ethnology Reports, 19th Report; Sylvester's "Indian Wars of New England," vol. 3 and index for "Forbes;" Sir William Johnson's Papers for 1758, vols. 2 and 3; Sawyer's "Firearms in American History;" Doddridge's "Settlements and Ind. Wars of Va. and Pa.;" Drake's "Book of Indians;" Peter Kalm's Travels, vol. 2; Howe's "The Great West," p. 80; Cort's "Henry Bouquet" p. 10; Col. Henry W. Shoemaker's "Cumberland Valley and the Highland Regiments" and other monographs; Hulburt's "Old Glade Road;" Girard's historical articles, Phila. *Inquirer*.

WITCH-DOCTORS and "hexing" played a colorful part in colonial Pennsylvania, in the cities as well as in the border towns. Day's work on Philadelphia is rich in various accounts. There was much digging in and about Philadelphia for pirate gold. Treasures supposed to have been concealed there by Kidd and Bellamy and a host of minor piratical lights caused many a man to step on a mean shovel of a dark night. The "Fairdens" and the belief they were French agents is based on a parallel case, taken from Day's book, if I remember correctly. In fact, it all terminated practically as it does in my story. Mercy's affair with the Indians in the cabin also follows closely an actual happening. I had Delaney's Cave in mind in describing the cave in the story. Description of it is found in Day's history of Fayette County in the volume cited above.

I find a tendency among historians rather to apologize for Washington because of his insistence on the Braddock road being utilized for the campaign. As an historical fact, so ably presented by Professor Hulburt in his "Old Glade Road," and documented by excerpts from correspondence between the incapable Sir John Sinclair, Forbes, Bouquet and Washington, General Forbes did not know which route he would take until late in the summer, and when the campaign was about to be abandoned he planned to take to the Braddock road if his scouts found it in passable condition. It is also amply proven that Washington urged the Braddock road so long as the decision was up in the air, but that he cheerfully and vigorously worked for the more direct route once a decision was made. His prophecy of the campaign's fizzling came within an inch of being fulfilled. All the conditions and obstacles he forecast were gone through with and encountered. If one would learn by what narrow margin Forbes succeeded, let him turn the historical minutiæ of the expedition as found in Professor Hulburt's most valuable work.

AFTER playing with this subject for some time, and reading omniverously anything that tended to throw a true light on the facts, I find myself still puzzled by Bouquet's permission for Major Grant to reconnoiter Fort Duquesne ahead of the army. His orders were for a reconnaissance. Then why take 805 men? Grant had declared there were not more than 200 French and Indians inside the stockade. When Forbes heard of his defeat and capture he said Grant's ambition had been his "perdition." Obviously Forbes believed Grant attempted what he was not expected to do—to capture the fort. And one of the greatest puzzles is the fact that Bouquet, the essence of caution when that virtue was necessary, gave the unfortunate and ambitious officer permission to advance on the fort. Young Ensign Chew with a few companions had no difficulty in scouting the fort and, from the top of what's now called "Grant's Hill," in making a careful study of the defenses and the garrison. The information he brought back was of military value. He learned all that Grant possibly could have learned had he kept his little army concealed and adhered to his orders. As a gesture to "dispirit" the French it was unnecessary. As a military maneuver it was disastrous.

In the contemporary accounts contained in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and other papers I find considerable dissimilarity, and I have followed Parkman's account. The French accounts of the number slain and captured are grossly exaggerated. Forbes' expedition was of tremendous historical importance, athough he captured the fort without a fight. The border remained quiet until Pontiac's uprising, when the Bedford-Ligonier road was of the utmost use in protecting the frontiers.

It is impossible to study closely all the sources I have given and strike an average between many divergent accounts without making errors. I am already indebted to friends for calling my attention to "slips," which I file away to use when a story goes into book form. Any who write in to gloat will receive a belt of black wampum. Once more I cry hail to the circle around the Camp-Fire and beat it back into the black bushes.—PENDEXTER.

Ask

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

General Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere

STRAIGHT

A News Bulletin of Outdoor Equipment

ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

A Service Organization with Stations and Experts all over the World

Blow-Guns

NOT only in the southern hemisphere do the savage tribes make use of this air weapon. And here is a magical formula used to speed the "thistle" on its way.

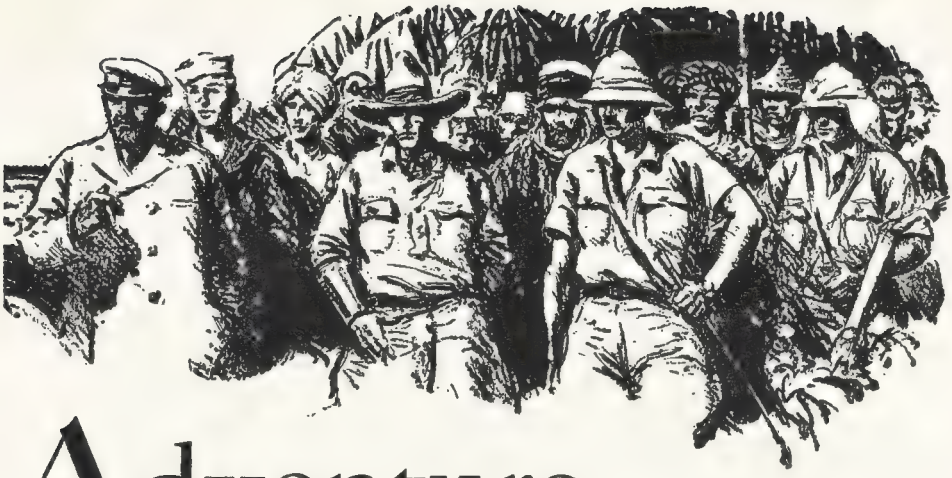
Request:—"Can you tell me which of the North American Indians were accustomed to use the blow-gun, either for hunting or for war?

The thing which has aroused my curiosity is my recent acquisition of one of these weapons, of Cherokee manufacture, and some fifty years of age. Made of cane, it is some eleven feet in length, with a bore of around half an inch. The darts are about two feet in length, made of hardwood and 'feathered' with some kind of vegetable fiber. These were used in hunting birds and small game, and were never poisoned, as is the case with the South American and African weapons.

I have been interested in the Indians and their weapons for many years, but until about two years ago I never knew that the Cherokee used the blow-gun. At that time I was told by a friend who married one of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee of an old man among them who could hit a half-dollar consistently at fifty feet. I can't do that well, but the other day I killed a chicken with it at sixty feet. My extreme range is about 150 feet, and a skilled user should do considerably better than that.

Anything you may be able to tell me I will greatly appreciate."—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Reply, by Mr. Woodward:—Your item on the blow-gun is an interesting one. I have been interested in that particular class of weapon for some time. It offers a most fascinating subject for study and speculation. As far as we know the use of the blow-gun within the boundaries of what is now the United States was confined to such tribes as the Cherokee, Choctaw, Yuchi, Huma and other Muskhogehan tribes dwelling in the southern states. The Iroquois also used it. Their name for it is *gagaanda* or airgun and the dart is called *gano*. The Iroquois guns were made of alder stems and were between four and six feet in length, the arrows being slender slivers of pointed wood from six inches to two feet



Adventure

Books You Can Believe

Verdicts by Experts on the Authenticity of Current Non-Fiction

Goods

and Commodities Tested by Our Experts

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Collecting and Discussing Old Songs still Living among the People

in length and "feathered" with the down or floss of the thistle. These tubes were used solely for bird-shooting and I believe the blow-guns in use in other parts of North America were used for that purpose only and were never poisoned or used against human adversaries.

The blow-gun in your possession is a typical one for that region. Practically all of the southern tribes using the weapons made them of cane, which abounds in most parts of the South.

The southern blow-guns were somewhat longer than those in use among the Iroquois. I have seen a Choctaw gun over eight feet in length. It is made from a single cane and the arrow is a pointed sliver of pine wood with thistle-down wrapped around the butt end. Sometimes the guns were made after the fashion of the South American tubes, of two pieces of hard wood, split lengthwise and each groove gouged out the same depth and the two joined together to make the barrel while the whole is bound around with bark withes or bands and covered with pitch or gum.

There is a Huma gun from Louisiana in this museum made of cypress wood in the manner described and it is about six feet long. The Cherokee call the darts "thistles," from the wadding used on the butt of the arrows. I expect your darts are "feathered" with thistle-down. It used to be the custom—probably still is in some parts of the Cherokee country—to gather the thistle-heads at the proper season and pack them together in the shape of a wheel and hang them in their houses until ready for use.

IN OLDEN times the Cherokees had many magical formulas, which if properly recited, would aid the petitioner in his love, war or hunting ventures. One of these formulas, relating especially to the hunting of birds with a blow-gun, is as follows:

"Listen! O Ancient White, where you dwell in peace I have come to rest. Now let your spirit arise. Let it (the game brought down) be buried in your stomach, and may your appetite never be satisfied. The red hickories have tied themselves together. The clotted blood is your recompense. O Ancient White—accept the clotted blood. O Ancient White, put me on the successful hunting trail. Hang the mangled things upon me. Let me come along the successful trail with them double up (under my belt).

"It (the road) is clothed with mangled things.

"O Ancient White, O Kanati, support me continually, that I may never become blue. Listen!"

This formula was recited by the bird-hunter before he started on his morning hunt. He stood by the fire, addressing it as "Ancient White," rubbing his hands together and repeating the prayer. Before starting on the hunt seven blow-gun arrows were first prepared in order that he might have them in readiness for the work at hand.

One of the seven was a short one, a magical arrow which he shot away at random, making no attempt to follow its flight, giving it to the powers that be as sort of a propitiatory gift. Then the hunter uttered a peculiar hissing sound which was supposed to draw the birds to him. The favorite hunting method was to climb into a gum-tree, haunted by the smaller birds for its berries, and there ensconce himself and pick off the birds as they feasted. When all of his darts were used up he dropped to the ground, drew the shafts from the bodies of the slain birds and repeated the performance.

Some of the expressions in the prayer are vague but others are understood, for example, "clotted blood" refers to the bloodstained leaves upon which the game had lain. It is a common expression in Cherokee hunting formulas. The hunter gathered these leaves up and cast them on the fire to get omens for his next hunt. "Let it be buried in your stomach" referred to these leaves cast in the fire. "The red hickories tied together" were the hickory withes which acted as a belt from which the game was suspended. "The mangled things" were of course the fallen birds.

Our Question and Answer service is free but our experts can not reply to queries that are not accompanied by stamped envelope.

Navy

HOW to join it. It seems a simple thing to do, but the requirements are exacting and the prospective recruit may as well prepare himself by learning them in advance.

Request:—"I am thinking seriously of trying to enlist in the Navy.

I am in sound health, weigh one hundred and fifty, am five foot seven and my age is twenty-eight next birthday.

Are there any more two-year enlistments?

Have you any idea how long I would be in training ashore or would my training be both ashore and afloat? The reason for this question is that I have heard that there are more dry land sailors than there are afloat. Could you give me a general idea of their drill?

What is the rate of pay?

Please give me any general information that you would think of value to one planning to enlist.

Do you know if there is a Navy recruiting service in Pittsburgh, Penna., as that would be my nearest point from where I now am?"—FRANK CASHDOLLAR, Chester, W. Va.

Reply, by Lieutenant Greene:—The ages for enlistment in the Navy are 17 to 35. The weight for 67 inches tall and over 21 years of age is not less than 136 pounds, so you are all right that way. You will have to be perfectly normal physically; they waive very little in time of peace. The term of enlistment is four years; there are no more two-year enlistments for recruits. Training is both ashore and afloat; young men are usually enlisted as apprentice seamen, and spend four months in training, of this two months is ashore at a training station and two months at sea on ships; the recruit is then eligible in point of time for his first advancement. If a recruit wishes to take advantage of any of the trade schools of the service, he can put in an application through his commanding officer for the same. After about one month at the training station is a good time.

As to the large number of dry land sailors, some one has evidently been kidding you. If you ship in the U. S. Navy you may depend on it that you will go to sea as soon as you are qualified, and that you will stay at sea for a long time. There are some "gobs" that get shore duty that is very necessary for the conduct of the Navy for certain periods, but there is no danger of a recruit getting in on this, unless possibly he might have some trade that was needed at some point ashore. This writer in over 20 years' service has had exactly 37 days shore duty, and this was while a commissioned officer. The reason of this was that he had just come out of the hospital and there was no ship available at the time. As soon as one was open he was sent to sea. So you see there are not so many chances of getting shore duty.

The drills are the school of the soldier—infantry drill and manual of arms. Boat drill, so that you will learn to be of some use in a small boat. Drill with heavy guns, and helping at target practise. General quarters, preparation for battle, abandon ship, to teach you where to go and what to do if it becomes necessary to abandon the ship at sea. Fire drill, the same if there should be a fire on the ship. You will have to qualify in swimming. If you do not know how you will have to learn, this comes under the head of a drill. It is usual for a man to take part in athletics. This also is considered part of the drills. Then training in the work of a seaman is carried on all the time.

I enclose herewith some literature that is put out by the Navy which will give details regarding pay, and etc.

Below are some requirements that must be complied with by all recruits:

Two recommendations, covering the past two years and if possible to be from former employers.

The certified copy of your certificate of birth, or your parents' affidavit as to birth.

If married the sworn consent of your wife.

You must be a full citizen of the U. S.

You must have completed the sixth grade of grammar school or have picked up an education that can be considered equal to that of the sixth grade.

There is a list of recruiting stations in the literature that I am sending you.

Before traveling to a recruiting station you should write to the nearest one, describe yourself to the recruiting officer and ask for the latest information about the needs of the service. Have an examination made by a local physician to see that you are normal physically. This will prevent a useless expenditure of money and time if there should be anything that might cause your rejection. If you get

to a recruiting station read carefully everything that they tell you to. Do not sign anything that you do not understand. If you do sign it the Department will hold you to it. The men at the station will explain anything that you do not understand.

One very important thing is to think it over carefully before you enlist. Be sure that you do want to ship in the service. After you have signed the papers it will be too late to back out. Remember that you will be entering a very strict exacting service, but at the same time one that is absolutely fair to every one. Your promotion will be entirely up to yourself. No favor is shown to any one, the man who is qualified is the one that goes up. If you show ability you are sure to go on up in rank.

Arizona

GOLD can be found there, but you have to know it when you see it. And then you have to know whether it is present in paying quantities, and a lot of other things.

Request:—"I take this occasion to ask your advice and information in regard to a prospecting trip, that a buddy and I are expecting to make.

We are expecting to start in somewhere around Indio, Eastward, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, to the Arizonas, and to look that country over thoroughly.

What are the best means of transportation to use? Burros?

What kind of technical tools would you advise?

We will look for gold principally."—C. H. LEWIS, San Fernando, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Harriman:—In the first place prospecting without an intimate knowledge of the desert country and a fair working knowledge of mineral forms, is more than a wild gamble.

Prospectors walk or use a Ford car, stopping to walk over the country at intervals. It is a safe thing to do to examine carefully any rock outcropping that is discolored, especially if rusty red, showing iron stains.

Each man must have a strong magnifying glass with three lenses, that fold in and are covered on both sides in the pocket. A little bottle of hydro-chloric acid, with a glass stopper, for testing any yellow speck. Gold is unchanged by acid, iron pyrites (fool's gold) burns up under acid.

A couple of burros to carry your beds, food, tools. Get a pair of alforgas for packing. These are rawhide panniers or packing bags, with square bottoms. They hang by broad bands across a pack-saddle. With these it is a case of the common packing into a box. Have a wide bellyband from one to the other under the burro and fasten the covers down tightly, then throw a tarp over all and fasten that securely to keep dust out. Your beds and tools on the other burro, also under a dust tarp. Use a waterproofed, heavy canvas for these tarps. Get a tent large enough for two and use Preservo on it. Use tarps as ground-cloth at night, under beds, with alforgas inside tent to protect them.

At Army and Navy store, get trench shovels, light picks. Buy gold-pans for washing placer dirt. Time enough to buy stone drills, single-jacks, giant powder, fuse and caps, after you locate a ledge or outcropping showing values.

Our experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question to direct the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine. All questions on actual travel should be addressed to "Adventure's Travel Association," care *Adventure*, not to this department. All questions, however, on equipment (except ordinary travel equipment) should be addressed to this department, not to "Straight Goods."
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. **Cover Your Ground**—Make questions definite. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 5742 Stony Island Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Yachting BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash., or HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 6 East 45th St., New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 1133 Broadway, New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, operating cost, legislative restrictions, public safety.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1880. *Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties.* DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 75, Salem, Oregon.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazard, the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M.D., Falls City, Neb.

Camp Cooking HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector. including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.*—VICTOR SHAW, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.*

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock promotion.*—LIEUT.-COL. W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign LIEUT. GLENN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. International and constitutional law concerning Naval and maritime affairs.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 241 Eleventh Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, Tudor Hall, Elmhurst, L. I.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey or SIGISMUND BLUMANN, Claus Spreckel Bldg., San Francisco, Cal.

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, felishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Museum of American Indians, 155th St. and Broadway, N. Y. City.

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.*—DR. G. K. NOBLE, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St. and Central Park West, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.*—DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

SPORTS

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 73 Farmington Ave., Long MEADOW, Mass.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune*, New York City.

Basketball JOE F. CARR, 16 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 160 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

GEOGRAPHICAL SECTIONS.—Covering climate, topography, natural resources (minerals, timber, agriculture, live-stock, water-power), commerce and industry, institutions, inhabitants, customs, languages, history, opportunities, living conditions, health, outdoor life, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping, equipment, expeditions, adventure, general information. Special subjects covered by any expert, in addition to the above, will be meationed in his section.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (See next two sections.)—BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American Shipping.*—HARRY E. RIESSBERG, Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean (Siberian Waters).*—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz.

Borneo CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★ **New Guinea** *Questions regarding the measures of policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia.

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★ **New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★ **Australia and Tasmania** PHILLIP NORMAN, 842 Military Rd., Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 3 *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 4 *Western China, Burma, Tibet.* CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★ **Asia Part 5** *China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China, and DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 6 *Japan.*—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL, San Rafael, Calif.

Asia Part 7 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Asia Minor.—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

✠ **Africa Part 2** *Sudan.* W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

Africa Part 3 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs, Caravan trade and caravan routes.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 4 *Tunis and Algeria.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Africa Part 5 *Morocco.* GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—W. C. COLLINS, care *Adventure.*

★ **Africa Part 7** *Transvaal, N.W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo.*—CHARLES BEADLE, Maison du Coin, Beaulieu-sur-Mer (Alpes Maritimes), France.

Africa Part 8 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Gulfport and Coast Enquiry Depot, Turnbull Bldg., Gulfport, Miss.

✠ **Africa Part 9** *Portuguese East.* R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontaria, Canada.

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Europe Part 2 *Albania.* ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C.

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South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil.*—PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 21 Claremont Ave., New York, N. Y.

South America Part 3 *Argentine, Uruguay and Paraguay.* Questions regarding employment not answered.—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.*

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Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche.* Also archeology.—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

Newfoundland.—C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland Also dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).—VICTOR SHAW, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska.

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✠ **Canada Part 3** *Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewadin.* Also Indian life and habits: Hudson's Bay Co. posts. No questions answered on trapping for profit.—S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck") L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada.

✠ **Canada Part 4** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠ **Canada Part 5** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.* Also national parks.—A. D. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

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✠ **Canada Part 7** *Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackensie and Northern Keewatin.*—REECE HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba.

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A News Bulletin *of Outdoor Equipment and Commodities*

STRAIGHT GOODS

TESTED BY OUR EXPERTS

OUT in Oregon, where he settled after years of adventure in the frontier states, Donegan Wiggins has one of the most complete collections of old and new firearms in the country. And he knows how to use them. They tell many dramatic stories about this unassuming man who can save the life of a boy accused of murder by testifying on the weight of a bullet, or just as vividly go into the technical details of old and modern rifle construction.

Since he was thirteen years old Wiggins has used and studied firearms, and since 1919 he has passed on some of his experiences and knowledge to *Adventure* readers as "Ask Adventure" expert on firearms. Many knotty questions have been settled in "Camp-Fire" and "Ask Adventure" simply by getting a verdict from "Old Man Wiggins." He has now taken on the work of firearm testing for "Straight Goods" and gives here the reports of his first tests.

On his trip from one side of the continent to the other last month Mr. Wiggins was invited by eastern gun manufacturers to inspect factory processes and new models which he describes in this and succeeding issues. He has personally tested his equipment and his reports will interest all sportsmen.

Tests of other equipment are also being carried on and bulletins will appear in early issues of *Adventure*. Donegan Wiggins is preparing a report on automatic pistols and a group of hunting knives; another expert is trying out a new fishing line and reel; others are testing bait, boat equipment, and seasonable sports goods. The expert assigned to each test is to give absolutely impartial reports, discussing the advantages or disadvantages of the product and describing his test. Whether or not a manufacturer advertises in *Adventure* does not affect the "Straight Goods" report.

As the experts report on products our list of recommended goods will be formed. This list as well as the comments of the "Ask Adventure" men will appear in the department and several times a year will be issued in booklet form so that you may have them as permanent reference lists. Recommended products may be marked by the manufacturer with our stamp—an arrow with the words "Straight Goods—Tested and Passed by *Adventure*."

Questions concerning any product should be sent directly to the expert listed in the Questions and Answers Division—not to the "Straight Goods" Department.

REPORTS OF TEST

THE NEW .22 WINCHESTER RIFLE, MODEL 56. (Winchester Repeating Arms Co., New Haven, Conn.) One of the new offerings especially recommended to sportsmen and out-of-doors men is the new Winchester .22 caliber bolt action repeating rifle, the Model 56; five shot, bored and chambered for either the .22 short, or for the .22 long rifle ammunition, to suit the user. However, it is not recommended that both sizes be used in the rifle chambered for the .22 long rifle.

The rifle has a clip or box magazine, detachable, holding five cartridges and inserted through the bottom of the arm. Open sights are supplied, but Lyman No. 42W receiver sight is furnished at a slight additional cost.

The action seems very smooth and reliable, like other Winchesters; the safety device is merely a quarter turn of the cocking piece to the right; the stock is well adapted to a steady hold, and a good pistol grip is there to afford the correct grip. Light and easy to carry, too, fortunately.

We feel positive that this rifle will be one of the most popular of all the small-bore tribe this season, and will increase in popularity as time passes. Positive action, Winchester accuracy, excellent workmanship and design. It is officially approved. —DONEGAN WIGGINS.

THE CROSMAN AIR RIFLE. (Crosman Arms Company, 500 St. Paul Street, Rochester, New York.) The new Crosman air rifle is a correctly designed weapon, employing for a propelling agent compressed air. The pressure is obtained by operating

the combination forearm and lever to produce the desired pressure. The weapon is sturdily built, made of good material, with a rifled bore and excellent sights, blade front and rear receiver sight, adjustable either for elevation or windage.

In recent tests made by the "Straight Goods" man, the little rifle, with its tiny hourglass-shaped pellet of lead, put five shots in one hole at twelve yards, throwing the pellets through a half-inch of pine.

For a weapon to be used where noise is objectionable and a rapid rate of fire is not necessary, as in camp for pot-meat, and because it uses wonderfully cheap ammunition, the Crosman air rifle is a very desirable weapon. Fine for the city dweller to keep in trim with, too. For target use, the extreme power should not be used; for rats, sparrows, and vermin in general, the heaviest possible charge should be used. It is officially approved.—DONEGAN WIGGINS.

U M C RUSTLESS CARTRIDGES. (Remington Arms Company, 25 Broadway, New York City.) When Flobert or Daniel Wesson, whoever it was, placed powder, bullet and priming compound together in a copper case and made the first metallic cartridge he took the second step in the perfection of ammunition, the first being the discovery that a bullet went a better regulated course after leaving the muzzle of the weapon if it were lubricated.

And now, the third and perhaps the greatest step has been taken by the Remington Arms Company in the production of a new .22 caliber ammunition that will enable the user of little arms to shoot all he pleases and have no fear about the condition of the bore of his weapon afterward, even though he fails to clean it.

I have tested this ammunition, the .22 smokeless variety, and have found it to be exactly what is claimed for it. A perfect barrel was used, fifty cartridges of the .22 short smokeless variety were fired from it, and the rifle was set away uncleaned, while a misty rain was falling. The exterior of the arm was wiped with an oily cloth to prevent exterior rust, but the bore was purposely left untouched, to test the non-fouling qualities of the cartridges.

Ten days passed, and the rifle was then inspected. No fouling showed in the bore, merely some unburned grains of powder and dust that had gathered in the muzzle. A clean rag run through the bore showed no rust or corrosion in any part of the rifle's interior.

Just what this will mean to the user of the .22 rimfire rifles it is easy to imagine. I feel certain that ten .22 rifles rusted out in the past to every one that wore out, or was shot out, as we call it.

I have an old repeater that has seen fifteen years of hard service, under all imaginable conditions, and with all sorts of ammunition, and it is still more accurate than I can aim it. The bore shows the effect of erosion only, not of rust. But this is because it has been cared for like a millionaire baby all the time. On the other hand, the average .22 rifle is ruined by rust in the first year of its life because it does not get this care. Shot, set away until the user finds time for cleaning; neglect does its work and aided by moisture and rust ruins the bore of the rifle.

With the new Remington-UMC ammunition, you may safely forget all about cleaning your .22 rifles. You must of course have the bore clean before using the new ammunition, but after that, just forget it. The secret is in the priming compound. Something has been incorporated therein that ensures that no rust will attack the steel. Just think of that when it is raining, you are tired, and the rifle is dirty. They are officially approved.—DONEGAN WIGGINS.

If the products described in "Straight Goods" are not carried at your local store the manufacturers will be glad to give you further information if you write saying you have been referred to them by *Adventure*.

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published twice a month at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1926. State of New York, County of New York, *ss.* Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Editor of *Adventure* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York, N. Y. Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York City. Managing Editor, none. Business Managers, none. 2. That the owner is THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City, whose stockholder is: THE FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J., whose stockholder is: THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City, whose stockholders are: ASIEL & Co., 11 Wall Street, New York City; WILLIAM G. BAGGOLEY, 2116 Mallers Building, Chicago, Illinois; CHARLES D. BARNEY, Mills Building, New York City; WILLIAM FREIDAY, 66 Broadway, New York City; WILLIAM O. HAMLIN, 60 Broadway, New York City; FREDERICK J. HART, care of Moore & Schley, 100 Broadway, New York City; HEIDELBACH, ICKELHEIMER & Co., 49 Wall Street, New York City; S. R. LATSHAW, Butterick Building, New York City; LUKE, BANKS & WEEKS, 14 Wall Street, New York City; JOS. A. MOORE, 300 Park Avenue, New York City; NOYES & JACKSON, 42 Broadway, New York City; FRED SIEGMUND, care of Moore & Schley, 100 Broadway, New York City; J. A. SISTO & Co., 68 Wall Street, New York City; J. W. SPARKS & Co., 66 Broadway, New York City. 3. *That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:* DIME SAVINGS BANK, De Kalb Avenue, Brooklyn, N. Y. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1926. BLEVINS C. DUNKLIN, Notary Public, New York County. County Clerk's No. 179, Register No. 7118; Bronx County Clerk's No. 9, Register No. 2710; Kings County Clerk's No. 18, Register No. 7076. (*My commission expires March* 30, 1927.) (Seal.) Form 3526—Ed. 1924.

Old Songs that Men have Sung

Conducted by R. W. GORDON

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them. Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and if all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelope and sufficient reply postage (not attached). Write to Mr. R. W. Gordon direct (*not* to the magazine), care of Adventure, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

IN THE issue of this department for April 29, 1924, appeared a version of "The Roaming Gambler." Here is another text that differs widely from the one already printed. I have run across the song many times, but never twice in the same form. It has for years been known and sung throughout the South. I'd like much to have any bits of information you can give as to its age and history, and any other versions that you may know.

Reuben Potter, who contributes the following text, says: "I have heard it sung as long as I can remember, and mother says it was old when she was young."

THE GAMBLING MAN

(Contributed by Reuben Potter)

I am a roving gambler,
I've gambled all around,
Wherever I meet with a deck of cards
I lie my money down.

I had not been in Washington
Many more weeks than three,
Till I fell in love with a pretty little girl
And she fell in love with me.

She took me in her parlor,
She cooled me with her fan,
She whispered low in her mother's ears
"I love this gambling man!"

"O daughter, O dear daughter,
How could you treat me so,
To leave your dear old mother
And with a gambler go?"

"O mother, O dear mother,
You know I love you well,
But the love I hold for this gambling man
No human tongue can tell.

"I wouldn't marry a farmer,
For he's always in the rain;
The man I want is the gambling man
Who wears the diamond ring.

"I wouldn't marry a blacksmith,
For he's always in the dirt;
For the man I want is the gambling man
Who wears the ruffled shirt.

"I wouldn't marry a doctor,
He is always gone from home;
All I want is the gambling man
For he won't leave me alone.

"I wouldn't marry a railroad man,
And this is the reason why;
I never seen a railroad man
That wouldn't tell his wife a lie.

"I hear the train a-coming,
She's coming around the curve,
Whistling and a-blowing
And straining every nerve.

"O mother, O dear mother,
I'll tell you if I can;
If you ever see me coming back again
I'll be with the gambling man."

"I've gambled down in Washington
And I've gambled over in Spain;
I am on my way to Georgia
To knock down my last game."

ANOTHER song equally wide spread is "Ole Joe Clark." It has no real story; hence almost any four-line stanza can be introduced to fill out at the whim of the singer. The tune is practically the same in all cases, and the chorus appears with only minor variations. I give two short versions:

OLE JOE CLARK

(Version of A. F. Barnett)

Oh if I had a needle and thread
As fine as I could sew,
I would sew myself to my true love's side
And down the road I would go.

Walk, walk, ole Joe Clark
Fare you well, I am gone;
Walk, walk, ole Joe Clark
Good-by, Betty Brown!

If ever I marry in my life
I'll marry not for riches,
I'll marry a girl just sixteen feet
And she can't wear my britches.

I had not been married more than a week,
My wife she was the devil,
She beat my head with a walking-stick
And banged my eye with the shovel.

Oh if I had a scolding wife
I'd whip her, sure's you're born;
I'd take her down to New Orleans
And trade her off for corn.

Oh a nigger trader bought me,
And took me down the line,
And tied me up to the whipping-post
And gave me forty-nine.

Walk, walk, old Joe Clark
Fare you well, I am gone;
Walk, walk, ole Joe Clark
Good-by, Betty Brown!

JOE CLARK

(Version of L. R. Baker)

When you see that gal of mine
Somethin' you must tell her,
Don't go foolin' along wid me
But get some other fellow.

Rock along, old Joe Clark
Rock along, Miss Lou
Rock along, old Joe Clark
Ain't a-goin' to marry you.

I went up to the mountain
To give my horn a blow,
When I heard my true love say
"Yonder comes my Joe."

Rock along, old Joe Clark
Rock along, Miss Lou
Rock along, old Joe Clark
Ain't a-goin' to marry you.

WONDER if any of you can help me find a bit of author verse? If I could get at books I could run it down myself, but I'm traveling far from libraries just now. Here are two of the verses: I don't remember the title.

My partner's horse is my horse, bunky,
From his fetlock to his buckling strap—
From his flying hoofs to his saddle strap—
My partner's horse is my horse, bunky.

My partner's gun is my gun, bunky,
From the trigger to the front sight—
And the butt (it is like a friend's hand gripping hard)—
My partner's gun is my gun, bunky.

SEND all contributions of old songs and all questions concerning them, to R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Camp-Fire Buttons—To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

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WILL SELL: 57 copies of *Adventure*, 1924; few 1923; excellent condition.—MARTHA VAN AUSDALL, Berkely Heights, N. J.

WILL SELL: 225 copies of *Adventure*, 1917 to date, incomplete. Five cents each F. O. B.—LESTER AUMIC, Route 41, Schenectady, N. Y.

WILL SELL: Complete file from May 1911 to March 1920, in good condition. Best offer takes lot.—H. SMITH, Pettee Inn, Newton Upper Falls, Mass.

WILL SELL: *Adventure* from March 1923 to date. About 130 copies in perfect condition. As a lot.—F. J. TOUTTENUY, McKees Rocks, Pa.

WILL SELL: 1923 complete; 1924 complete to Nov. 20th. At fifteen cents each, express collect.—SYLVESTER GARNTY, 808 Lindsey St., South Bend, Ind.

WANTED: Copy of the issue of July 10th, 1923. Write—HARRY LANCETTE, St. Clair P. O., St. Paul, Minn.

WILL SELL: *Adventure* from first issue (1911) through 1916 with few exceptions. Make offers to—THOS. S. CURTIS, 5111 Clarendon St., Vancouver, B. C.

WILL SELL: *Adventure* complete for 1923, '24, and '25 in perfect condition.—BURLEIGH BOOK SHOP, Box 288, Hawthorne, Calif.

WILL SELL: One hundred issues of *Adventure* for years 1920-'26, at ten cents per issue, collect.—HENRY WILLYARD, Route 5, Marion, Ill.

Identification Cards—Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

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Books You Can Believe—Verdicts of our experts on the reliability of non-fiction books appear in alternate issues.

Lost Trails—This department for finding missing friends and relatives is printed only in alternate issues.

Adventure's Travel Association—A complete statement of the organization, stations and cooperating factors will appear in the issues of January 1st and 15th.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of* ADVENTURE, *that of January 1st*

A Complete *Novel*

The Red Flame of Erinpura

By Talbot Mundy

John Duncannon knew all about American business methods but very little about the gods of India. Consequently he shot one of the tigers of the *Gnani* of Erinpura, and thereafter awoke to find a fat man taking care of him. "Am expert manager," said *Chullunder Ghose.* "Wisdom being priceless, make no charge for same, but for necessary application of philosophy to fact this babu should be recompensed." And so he was, thanks to his own craft and to a set of unusual circumstances.

Two *Serials:*

Beginning Painted Ponies

By Alan LeMay

When *Slide Morgan* rode into the Wyoming country—on gambling bent —he soon incurred the enmity of the powerful and merciless *Cade* clan. Fortunately for *Slide* his luck was on.

Part Two of The Fighting Years

By Hugh Pendexter

The second part of the story which begins in this issue takes *Justin Nolton* and his Cherokee brother *Giga-tsuhli* deep into the valley of the wilderness, where they witness a tragedy and find friends.

A fine list of *Short Stories*

Copra, by Jacland Marmur, *a story of two loyalities;* Dog Lazy, by Bruce Johns, *he never missed a meal;* Alonso de Ercilla Y Zúñiga, *of the goodly company of adventurers,* by Post Sargent; The Little Black Bull of Santiago Luro, by Frederick Hopkins, *the gauchos understood their fellow;* Comrades of the Sea, by Bill Adams, *two boys find friendship in a strange way.*

*ANNOUNCEMENT: The next issue of *Adventure*, that of January 1st, will appear on January 1st. From now on *Adventure* will be issued on the first and fifteenth of each month, and will appear on the day of the issue's date. The January 15th issue will appear on January 15th.

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A Glass of Wine with the Borgias

The youth hesitates, hand on glass. Will he obey the imperious look of command in the eyes of the beautiful Lucrezia—the magnet that has drawn him to this supper in the pontifical apartment? Will he yield to the ingratiating advances of Cæsar Borgia and partake of the proffered cup? Or will he be warned before it is too late by the sinister glance shot from the cruel eyes of the old Pontiff as he coldly calculates the destruction of the young gallant?

To comply or refuse is equally hazardous. If he decline the poisoned draught will he escape the knife of the hired assassin even now lurking in the shadows of the papal palace?

Rodrigo Borgia (Alexander VI), Lucrezia and Cæsar formed the diabolical trinity which sat for eleven years upon the papal throne in Rome, an impious parody of the Holy Trinity—the most perfect incarnation of evil that ever existed on earth. How many gallant lives thus darkly and without commotion passed out of sight, whirled away by the headlong torrent of the ambition of that terrible triumvirate, is told as only that great weaver of world pictures, Alexandre Dumas, could tell in

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